

HOT AND BOTHERED PLANET

December 11, 1995

IN THESE TIMES

Theater of the absurd

The
twisted
logic
of the
budget
battle

SCOTT McLEEMEE
page 14

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E D I T O R I A L

NEWT'S WELFARE SMOKE SCREEN

In their campaign to pass a budget that would free big business of the few restraints imposed on its voracious greed, the Republicans have found the perfect diversion. With millions of people working harder and earning less, with job insecurity at a level not thought possible since the Great Depression of the '30s and with corporate profits and executive incomes rising rapidly, Newt Gingrich singles out "a welfare system which subsidizes people for doing nothing" as the culprit.

Speaking to Republican governors at a New Hampshire gathering, the House Speaker claimed to be addressing "the moral decay of the world [that] the left is defending." He chose as an example of this decay the recent killing in suburban Chicago of Debra Evans and two of her children by a couple who wanted the baby she was carrying. Apparently unable to conceive, the couple knew that Evans was in her ninth month. So they killed her, sliced her open, took the infant and then, fearing that the children might identify them, killed them too.

In Gingrich's warped mind, the welfare system taught the demented murderers to commit this atrocity. But welfare comes at a high cost in humiliation and social disdain. The subsidy that it provides "for doing nothing" is not much of a reward. And it tends to pacify those unfortunate enough to require its help. If the welfare system teaches its recipients anything, it is lassitude and hopelessness, not the kind of

covetous drive that requires total disregard for human life.

Appropriately enough, Gingrich's remarks caused a furor. His damage-control man, Tony Blankley, explained that the Speaker had simply been pointing out that "there are social pathologies in our society and [that] they have causes."

Yes, social pathologies do have causes. But welfare has nothing to do with the

pathology of Evans' killers. The all-pervasive worldview of our corporate enterprises provides a more compelling explanation. Consider, for example, the execution in Nigeria last month of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other human rights advocates. Saro-Wiwa died for opposing Shell Oil's despoiling of Nigeria's Ogoni region. Shell denied his charge that it was "encouraging genocide" against the Ogoni people by making their land

uninhabitable. "Genocide," a Shell official said, "involves killing people. We have never either killed people or contributed to their deaths." But Shell, whose operations in Nigeria supply half of the country's income, *has* destroyed much of its land, and many people have died as a result.

When Saro-Wiwa and the others were sentenced to death on trumped-up charges there was worldwide protest, but Shell, declining to use its great power, waited until the last minute to enter a tepid protest. A company flack rationalized Shell's inaction by arguing that it's "not for a commercial organization to interfere with the legal processes of a sovereign state"—as if Shell plays no role in the governance of Nigeria. Many business observers also subscribe to this view. David Manasian, an editor of *The Economist* and a commentator with Public Radio International's "Marketplace," maintained that Shell's only responsibility is to do "whatever it finds most convenient and profitable for its shareholders." Companies, he explains, "are amoral, profit-seeking enterprises, not vehicles for political or ethical judgments." Presumably, what's good for their bottom line is good for the world, because "morally neutral international commerce has been a great civilizing influence."

It's rare to find a defender of corporate hegemony being so candid, but Manasian's views are not unique. Indeed, they are the norm in the business world, and, therefore, in our political culture. Consider the A.H. Robbins Co., which manufactured and sold the Dalkon Shield for years after it learned that they caused pelvic infections and sterility in the women who used them. Or the tobacco industry, which, like Shell, still insists it has never killed anyone. Or asbestos manufacturers, who knew that their product caused cancer but kept that knowledge buried while they continued to inflict their product on the public. It seems to us that Evans' killers absorbed more from the pervasive attitudes of our business culture than from their dependency on welfare. And there's no doubt that Gingrich shares Shell's principles, to judge by the Republican Congress' plans to reduce taxes on the wealthiest Americans and increase the misery, and the mortality, of millions of low-income workers and unemployed.

In his defense of Gingrich, Blankley argued that it's necessary to identify what's gone wrong, and that "we are not powerless to change and improve our society." We agree. And we believe it's time to take up Blankley's challenge and speak out on the underlying causes of our national malaise. ◀

***Gingrich blames
the welfare system
for the moral
recklessness of the
corporate world.
But defenders of
Shell Oil at least
honestly avow its
moral bankruptcy.***

IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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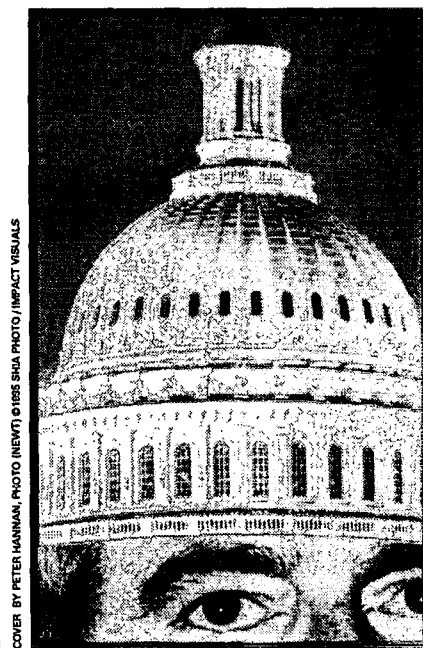
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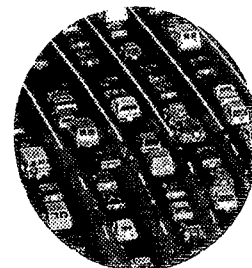
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LETTERS

Boil the suburbs

Walter Kendall III ("Letters," October 2) would have us believe that suburbanites are as good as everybody else. Not so. They are far inferior to city dwellers, who drive less and use public transit more. They've clamored against subsidized low-income housing in the suburbs for half a century, leaving the poor warehoused in the cities. They eat up public revenues with the expensive services required by low-population-density sprawl, and they keep the lawn-pesticide industry in business.

Should we bomb suburbanites into oblivion as William Upski Wimsatt has suggested in recent articles? Better to boil them alive in a stew of pollutants—one part air-conditioner freon, one part used motor oil and one part pesticides. At least their welfare ought to be cut off: no more interstate highway subsidies, homeowners mortgage deductions and costly sewage extensions, etc.

Roderick N. Ryon
Baltimore

Drop the beer, Joel

I often send copies of Joel Bleifuss' "The First Stone" to friends so as to let them know how much multinationals are screwing us over. Bleifuss is best at showing some of the worst features of the corporate world, but he goes a bit too far in his November 13 article, "Pavlov's pack rats."

Yes, corporations are responsible for much of our garbage. And yes, reusable beverage containers are far more efficient than disposable containers. However, if we didn't buy the garbage that corporations produced, wouldn't we all be better off?

Because corporations dominate our society, we are forced to buy at least some corporate garbage. But Bleifuss feels that recycling is beneath him. However, it's not our only option. We can also reduce. For example, I drink mostly reverse osmosis water, which generates much less garbage (and corporate revenue) than the beer that Bleifuss drinks. I ride a

bicycle to avoid using the toxic automotive chemicals that corporations produce. And I eat a vegetarian diet—partly to avoid supporting the livestock industry, which pollutes and degrades our environment.

Recycling is better than our other existing options for handling corporate garbage—landfilling or incinerating. As Bleifuss points out, using crushed glass from beverage containers as a replacement for sand in asphalt is far better than raping the earth for virgin metal and wood.

Despite the power multinationals have over lives, we do have some choice in terms of what we consume, and, therefore, we share some of the blame in the production of corporate garbage. So come on, Joel, take those beer bottles out of the trash and recycle.

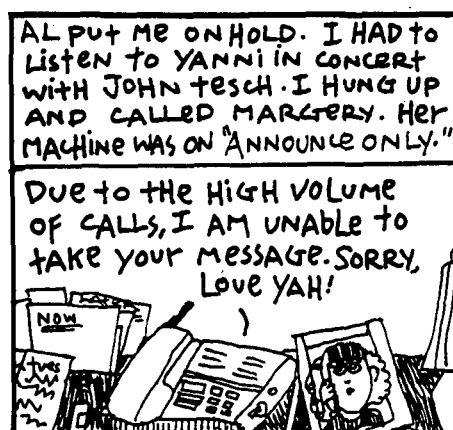
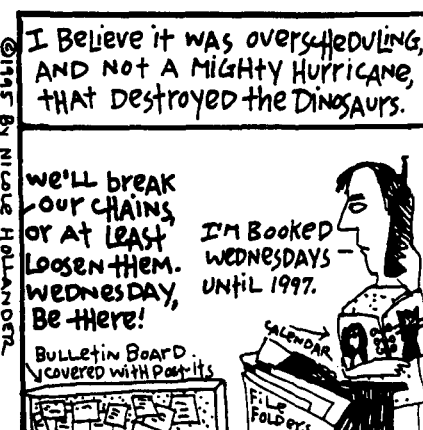
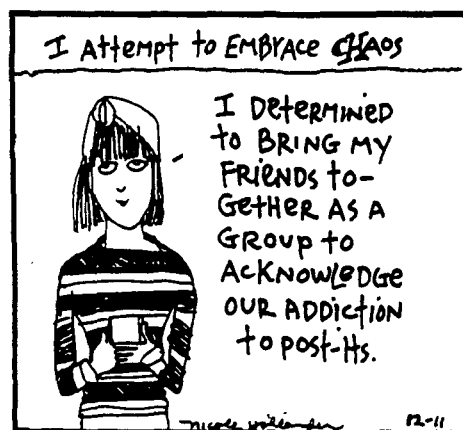
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Albuquerque, N.M.

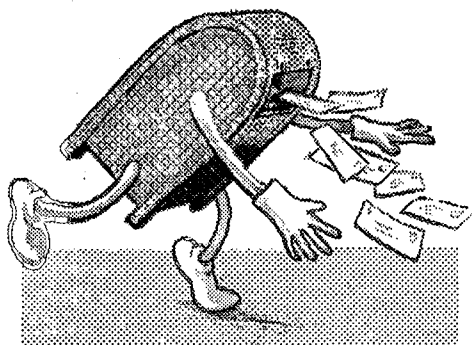
Dollars vs. the drug war

I was glad to read Dan Lazare's "Weed Whackers" (November 13); it's nice to have alternative information to counter the usual drug-war hysteria. But whereas Lazare implicitly argues that debunking myths about the medical effects of marijuana is the most effective way to counter drug warriors, I believe that the promotion of hemp products is more likely to produce a

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander





long-term change in drug policy.

A growing number of hemp wholesalers and retailers are selling hats, clothing, paper, twine, wallets and oil products manufactured from hemp (see Coop America Green Pages, 1996).

Once businesses become more established in the hemp industry, the rhetoric of the drug war—at least as it applies to marijuana—will be amended. This is because hemp is currently imported from Eastern Europe and China, and developments are under way in Canada, England and other countries to bring back low-THC hemp farming. Soon American farmers will demand the opportunity to cash in on this, and they will have the support of enough retailers and wholesalers to build a broad-based political coalition. The drug warriors will be asked to step aside, not by a loosely knit band of stoners but by businesses. Since corporate interests usually win out in this country over other interests, changes in marijuana policy may be on the horizon.

Phil Nicholas Jr.
Easton, N.Y.

Kudos for Farrakhan

Salim Muwakkil's "Face the nation" (October 30) is as good a report on the Million Man March as can be found in both the mainstream and alternative press. I regret, howev-

er, that he could not resist highlighting the issue of the march as a valid idea despite the motives and deeds of its creator, Louis Farrakhan.

Racism in America is alive and well, and it appears that only Farrakhan was willing to put his reputation and resources on the line to make that type of statement. Imagine the field day the media and the establishment would have had if the march had failed to attract the numbers it did. Racists of whatever type and style will continue to use divide-and-conquer tactics to combat any meaningful black organization. Regrettably, they always find enough black conservatives to fuel their fires.

It is often asked why, in apparent inconsistency, we carp against Cuba while seemingly accepting other socialist countries such as Vietnam and China. The answer to that conundrum is that Fidel Castro will not compromise when the health of his revolution is threatened. Minister Farrakhan, seemingly always quoted out of context—even by Muwakkil—is of the same mind. That is why he is so dangerous to the white power machinery. He is our conscience. The enemy is racism, not each other. Louis Farrakhan will not let us forget that. For that alone, he deserves our trust, our support and our energy.

Don Sloan
New York City

Productivity for what?

Something in David Moberg's "Reviving the public sector" (October 16) made me stop and rub my eyes. After going over it three times, there was no way of avoiding what looks like a real blooper: "Raising wages requires long-term increases of productivity..."

But productivity *has* been increasing: new machinery, new systems, CAD-CAM, automation, the computer chip revolution. Consider the agricultural sector: Once, most of the population was engaged in farming,

but now a mere 2 percent work on farms. Instead, 1.8 million agribusinesses run by giant corporations produce enough food for us all. And on the industrial front, some factories need only a handful of employees sitting at consoles to produce a veritable flood of products.

Some estimates suggest that only 7 percent of the current workforce is engaged in actual production; 40 percent is redundant and the remainder of the workforce is employed in service industries. This explains downsizing (a nice euphemism for slashing the labor force)—and the increasing profits going to corporations. I would expect a plea for increasing productivity from corporate CEOs or their flacks—but not in a newsmagazine such as *ITT*.

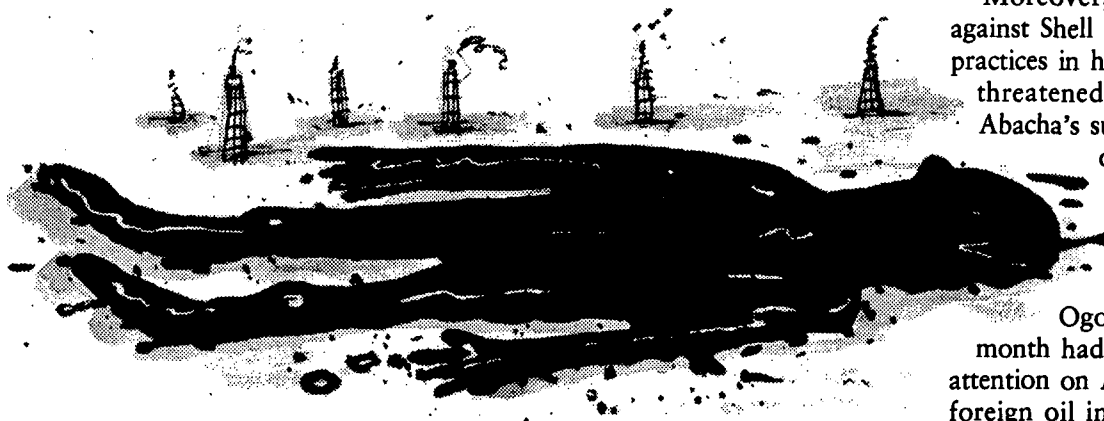
In industrial countries such as ours it is easily possible to produce the necessities of life for all. In view of all the part-time workers and growing unemployment, it would make more sense to raise the demand for a reduced workweek.

Growth? Where does it all end? The rate at which we increase growth is unsustainable and will lead to further environmental degradation. We are on our way to destroying the biosphere on which we depend. This does not apply to most of the countries of the South, whose use of world resources is minuscule compared to the advanced industrialized countries of the North. The multinational corporations are trying to change all that; but to base policy positions on productivity increases is sheer folly. Rather, what is needed is a redistributive approach and new priorities for what is produced.

Don Amter
New York City

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

INSHORT



THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG

The only thing surprising about Nigeria's execution of human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa was the timing. During his two years in power, Nigerian ruler Gen. Sani Abacha has trampled on democratic rights at home and scoffed at international protests. But by having the executions carried out on November 10, the opening day of the Commonwealth Summit in New Zealand, the military ruler may have thumbed his nose at the rest of the world one time too many. While the Commonwealth promptly suspended its wayward member, the European Union instituted an arms embargo against Abacha's regime.

Long a hatchet man for Nigeria's previous dictators, Abacha grabbed control of Africa's most populous state in November 1993. Abacha made his move several months after his military predecessor failed to abide by the results of what was widely considered to be Nigeria's fairest elections since the country

won its independence in 1960. After the apparent winner, Chief Moshood Abiola, declared himself president in defiance of Abacha's ploy, he was put in prison, where he remains. Earlier this year, Abacha tried a former military ruler, Olusegun Obasanjo, on charges of plotting to overthrow the Abacha government. A secret tribunal found Obasanjo guilty, and,

like Saro-Wiwa, denied him appeal. But Obasanjo had an ace in the hole. His arrest sparked dissent within the military, an institution Abacha cannot afford to alienate, and Obasanjo's sentence was commuted in October. Saro-Wiwa, meanwhile, could only appeal to the court of public opinion in the West—a tribunal Abacha clearly feels that he is free to ignore.

Moreover, Saro-Wiwa's protests against Shell Oil's destructive drilling practices in his Ogoni homeland also threatened the other mainstay of Abacha's support, Nigeria's foreign oil interests. Saro-Wiwa and the eight other leaders of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People executed last month had focused unprecedented attention on Abacha's close ties with foreign oil interests. (See "Nigeria's Shell game," February 20.) Oil makes up 80 percent of the Nigerian government's revenue and more than 90 percent of its exports. During peak production, Ogoniland turned out more than 10 million barrels of crude oil a day.

As more oilfields have been discovered in Nigeria, Ogoniland's output has declined in importance; still, Saro-Wiwa and the eight other Ogoni rights activists' demand for \$10 billion in environmental damages and royalties from the Nigeria government and Shell

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Nader for president

CONSUMER ADVOCATE EXTRAORDINAIRE RALPH Nader has placed his name on California's presidential primary ballot. Announcing on November 27 that he would run under the auspices of the California Green Party, Nader promised to wage a campaign that will take the "corrosive impact of special interest money out of politics at the same time that it preaches campaign finance reform." According to Mike Feinstein of the California Green Party, "Nader's candidacy is a testing of the waters to see if progressives around the country are willing to build and help finance the coalitions that would make the candidacy viable nationally." —Joel Bleifuss



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APPALL-O-METER

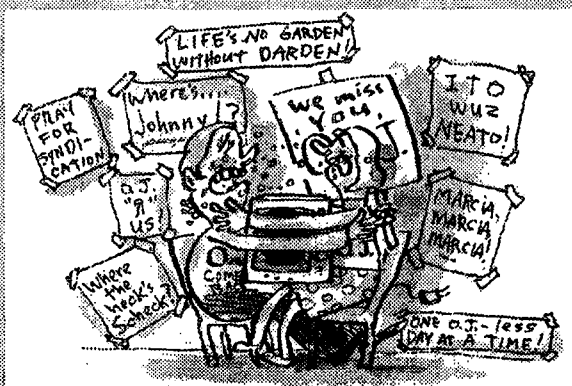
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Love the Juice 4.3

Those feeling squeezed dry now that the Juice is loose can turn to others for support. According to the *New York Observer*, former O.J. trial addicts in

Branch County, Mich., Undersheriff Gary Abbott returned four times to the spa for "full-body" sexual massages, the *San Francisco Examiner* reports. According to Sheriff Ted Gordon, who



L.A. have begun forming support groups to cope with their feelings of loss now that the trial is over. "Suffering O.J. withdrawal," one classified ad in a Santa Monica newspaper reads, "Meet like-minded singles. Call for more information."

Open mic 5.7

In an attempt to prove that the 24-hour Coldwater Health Spa was actually an illegal massage parlor in disguise,

defended his officer against critical press coverage and perhaps a few sniggering remarks by the local citizenry, the repeat visits were necessary because the tape recorder Abbott was using was an old model, and very unreliable. "You couldn't hear the women make the proposition," he explained—though Abbott evidently had no trouble hearing at the time.

Casualties of war 8.1

After pleading guilty to charges of sexually abusing an adolescent boy, a British man appealed for leniency because he claimed to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Apparently Impressed by Phillip Edwards' stories of heroic service in the Falklands War (and perhaps fooled by the faux medals he had a habit of wearing), Judge Michael Gibbon let the sex offender off with a relatively light sentence—only a little more than two years in jail. "You have served your country well," he told Edwards, "and probably suffered as a result." There was only one problem with Edwards' story, *London's Daily Telegraph* reports: It's entirely false. The admitted molester spent the war in Britain nursing a foot injury he sustained several days before his ship was to sail.

Stunned by a stupid statement? Nauseated by a noxious news story? Contact the Appall-O-Meter, c/o In These Times, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Please enclose a copy of the appalling item.

declaring that the Nigerian was "no longer my friend."

South African President Nelson Mandela called Abacha's regime an "illegitimate, arrogant military dictatorship that murdered activists in a kangaroo court." Though Mandela's condemnation of Abacha was seconded by nearly all global leaders, his call for an international embargo against Nigerian oil has attracted less fervent support.

The United Nations Security Council must vote unanimously to implement oil sanctions, and the world's petroleum interests seem poised to block the measure. Indeed, Shell Oil is set to go forward with plans for a \$4 billion natural gas plant in Nigeria, and although the United States has not ruled out an oil embargo, the possibility seems remote.

Without an oil embargo, other international protests will almost certainly fail to sway the general. "[Abacha] has come to believe that as long as he can guarantee business as usual ... he will be left alone to rule as he pleases and continue to steal Nigeria's oil wealth," says Nigerian writer and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinke. "He knows from past experience that, consistently, they will shout for a while and then shut up."

—Scott Straus

SALVAGE SOLDIERS

Many of the environmental rollbacks pushed by congressional right-wingers have stalled in the wake of Washington's budget battle. But the first shock has already arrived in the form of a budget rider that effectively overrides environmental laws on logging in some 100,000 acres of public forest.

That rider, which became law in July, allows timber companies to conduct controversial "salvage logging"

threatened to spark widespread resistance and demands for reparations.

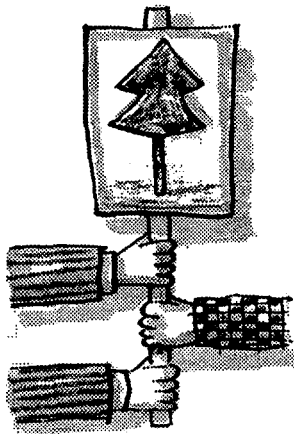
To squelch that possibility, the military conducted raids on Ogoni villages and killed several Ogoni leaders. During a meeting with Ogonis, the top officer of a specially created security task force reportedly bragged that he knew 204 ways to kill people, but had

practiced only three.

In the rest of Africa, the executions have been almost uniformly condemned. Even Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi—whose regime's human rights violations have been compared to Nigeria's in a new Amnesty International report—reversed his earlier support of Abacha,

operations in certain old-growth forests and other federal lands. Although logging on these lands is protected by other federal regulations, the new law allows the logging industry to cut, or "salvage," trees on lands that the U.S. Forest Service has declared to be experiencing a forest health crisis. The bill also prohibits environmentalists from filing legal appeals to block the practice.

Since the rider's enactment, concern over congressionally sanctioned "salvage logging" in old-growth forests has begun to drive mainstream environmental leaders toward more radical tactics long advocated by grass-roots groups such as EarthFirst! For years, grass-roots activists have bashed the Washington, D.C.-based cluster of national environmental groups for hogging most of the movement's financial support, while cutting back-



room deals that chipped away at such hard-earned gains as a series of federal injunctions (beginning in 1989) that suspended logging in the Northwest's ancient forests. The ancient forest movement, particularly in the Northwest, was born out of grass-roots frustration with the national groups.

In the 1980s, grass-roots groups used nonviolent direct actions such as sit-ins to put the ancient

forest issue on the political map. But as the issue entered the environmental mainstream, anti-logging initiatives became heavily dependent on conventional tactics, namely legal action. Last summer's ban on court appeals, however, has kicked the movement back to its old standby strategy: direct action.

Many of the actions are targeting the ancient and native forests of the Pacific Northwest, which were home to an earlier wave of protests. But this time there's a twist. When some 300

people showed up for an October 30 protest at Sugar Loaf, a southern Oregon ancient forest logging site, EarthFirst! co-founder Mike Roselle stood shoulder to shoulder with two mainstream environmental advocates, National Audubon Society Vice President Brock Evans and former Indiana Congressman Jim Jontz, who now leads the Western Ancient Forest Campaign. By the day's end, the forest service had arrested 90 protesters—including Roselle, Evans and Jontz. In the largest single act of environmental civil disobedience in Oregon history, they climbed over a newly erected fence and began a 12-mile march toward the Sugar Loaf logging site.

"The issues and stakes simply are too high and the places being destroyed too priceless to simply stand by any more," Evans wrote in an open letter circulated shortly before the protest. Although Evans and Jontz were quick to note they were acting on a strictly personal basis, Evans said he had "tremendous support from all my colleagues in all the organizations in Washington."

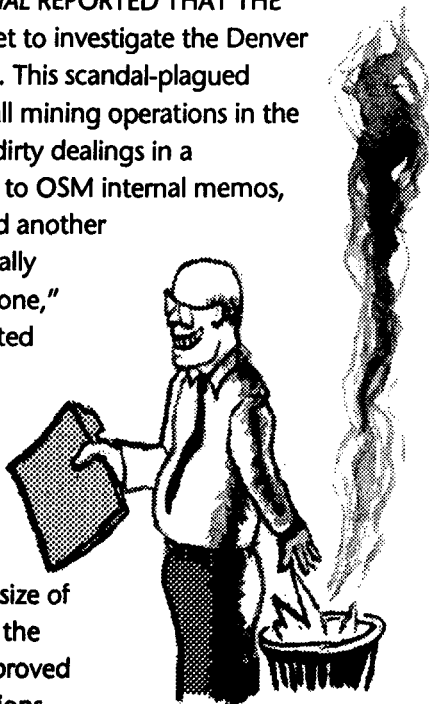
While winter will soon close down most Northwest logging, dozens of "salvage logging" operations are on the way for spring, when direct action is expected to reach a fever pitch. Grass-roots organizing and civil disobedience training are under way across the region. If Evans is on the mark, the coming campaign could revitalize a troubled national movement as well.

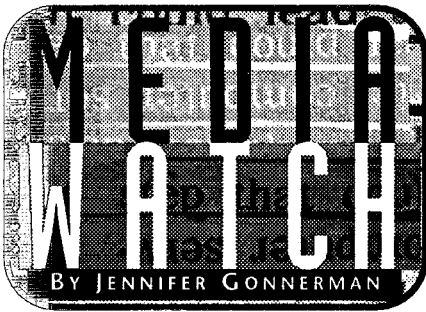
"When these kind of folks come across the line with us, it just gives the issue that much more credibility and visibility," says EarthFirst's Roselle. "The kind of commitment they're expressing here is really unprecedented. If this is just the beginning, then it's going to be really good."

—Patrick Mazza

Search and destroy

ON NOVEMBER 9, THE *ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL* REPORTED THAT THE Interior Department's inspector general was set to investigate the Denver branch of the Office of Surface Mining (OSM). This scandal-plagued Interior Department agency, which oversees all mining operations in the United States, has been accused of hiding its dirty dealings in a labyrinthine dual filing system that, according to OSM internal memos, consists of public files termed "green files" and another set of files—labeled "private"—which are illegally shielded from public access. (See "The First Stone," October 2.) On the very day the *Journal* reported the existence of this investigation, Rick Holbrook, a senior project manager at the OSM's Denver office, posted a computer memo to his colleagues titled "Trashing the Mine Plan Library." That memo, which was leaked by an OSM whistleblower, read in part, "I have been charged with reducing the size of the Mine Plan Library ... [W]e intend to keep the Green files, OSM decision documents, the approved Permit Application Package and pending revisions. Throw away everything else." —J.B.





Empowering cable's right wing

TTrue to its name, National Empowerment Television (NET), the 24-hour right-wing talk channel, just keeps moving into more of the cable market. Launched just two years ago, NET now reaches 12 million households and will soon reach millions more, with such shows as *The Progress Report with Newt Gingrich* and *On Target with the NRA*.

In September, the channel signed a distribution contract with Time Warner Cable—the nation's second largest cable operator—which allows it to negotiate with Time Warner's individual systems. This deal opens the door for NET to break into dozens of new media markets, including the country's biggest: New York City. Time Warner controls almost all of New York City's cable operations, and NET hopes to be on the air there in less than a year—just in time for the 1996 presidential election season.

NET already has a distribution deal with the country's largest cable operator, Tele-Communication Inc., and it got a huge boost earlier this year, when TCI announced plans to add NET to the new package of political channels it will offer subscribers.

Meanwhile, the proposed Time Warner-Turner merger—which will give TCI a stake in Time Warner—has NET staffers giddy about the possibility of expanding even more quickly. When asked about the impact of the merger on NET's growth, the channel's media director, Bradley Keena, simply chuckled and said, "We're not

going to be hurt by that."

While NET is now boasting an annual budget of \$10 million, the country's most prominent liberal cable outlet, the '90s Channel, just shut down. The '90s Channel dropped its programming last month when TCI hiked its rates. TCI insists that its motives were purely financial, not ideological. But many media watchers have doubts. "The gatekeeper role is becoming more significant than ever," says syndicated columnist Norman Solomon.

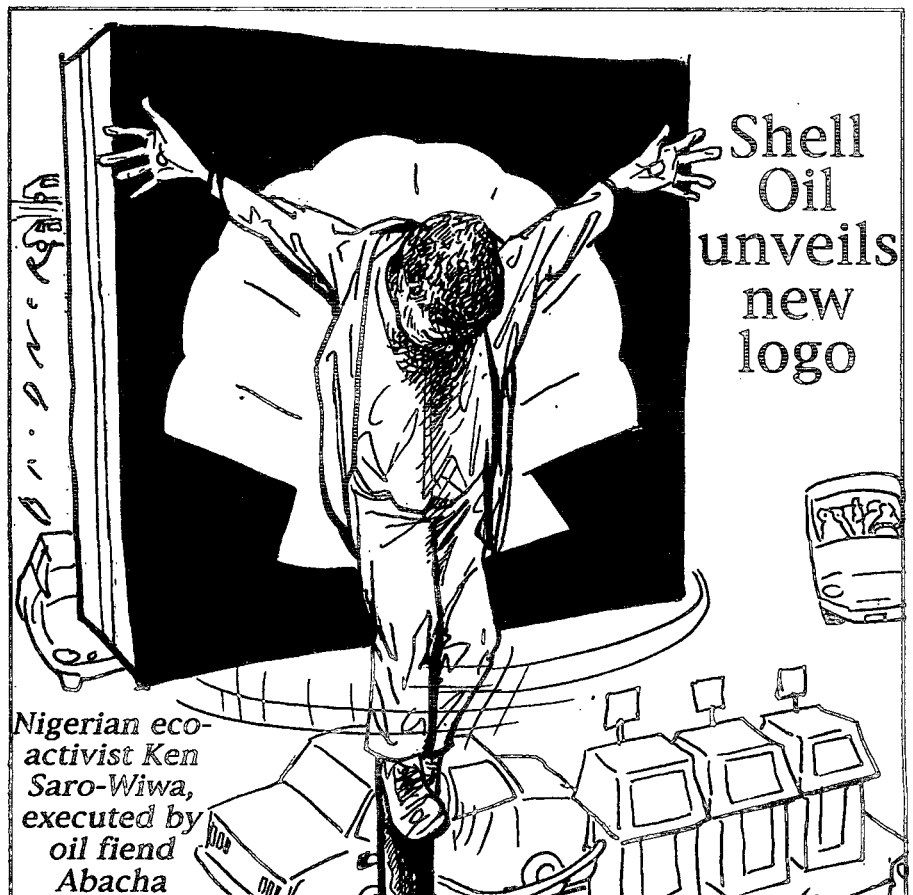
In late October, the Federal Communications Commission refused the '90s Channel's request to delay the rate increase. At press time, the channel was still deciding whether to appeal the decision. But the channel's commitment to progressive programming is continuing with Free Speech TV. Launched in June,

Free Speech TV now airs on 44 cable stations and reaches 4.2 million households each week with four hours of original programming. Free Speech TV's lineup includes a peace-oriented defense show as well as a program called Dyke TV. "Our goal," says John Schwartz, "is to have a full-time satellite-delivered television network."

Meanwhile, the releveraged new cable market seems, like the rest of the media, more hostile than ever to left-of-center viewpoints. "Cable television was supposed to diversify broadcasting," Solomon notes. "And it certainly seems, if anything, the opposite has taken place." With ultra-conservatives like John McLaughlin and Rush Limbaugh firmly ensconced in mainstream television, Solomon says, "right-wing alternative broadcasting is really an oxymoron at this point."

TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



Nigerian eco-activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed by oil fiend Abacha

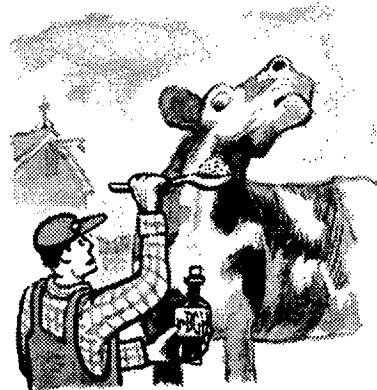
STORMING THE IVORY TOWER

When members of Yale University's board of trustees met in Manhattan last month, they were anticipating staid discussions of university finance and educational excellence. Instead, they found themselves confronting 150 angry university workers who had traveled from New Haven, Conn., to demand an equitable solution to contract negotiations that began on November 1.

Such disruptions of Ivy League tranquility are on the rise. Since last summer, Yale's three labor organizations—the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 35, which represents service and maintenance workers, HERE Local 34, which represents clerical and technical workers, and the still-unrecognized Graduate Student Employees Organization (GESO)—have mounted an increasingly militant campaign for fair contracts. The unions charge that the administration has forgotten its educational mandate and is applying the mantra of corporate America—raise

Spilt milk

RECONSTITUTED BOVINE GROWTH hormone (rBGH), Monsanto's bio-engineered drug that increases milk production in cows, has been a flop. According to dairy industry surveys, only 4 to 5 percent of America's dairy farmers are using the drug. Further, Canada and the European Union have refused to let the growth hormone into their country's milk supply. Meanwhile, the Pure Food Campaign, which has been organizing against the drug in the United States, reports that even within Monsanto opinion is divided. One Monsanto executive, who requested anonymity, told the Pure Food Campaign that although the product is "incredibly controversial ... even inside Monsanto," the company's top executives believe they are "in too deep to back off now." —J.B.



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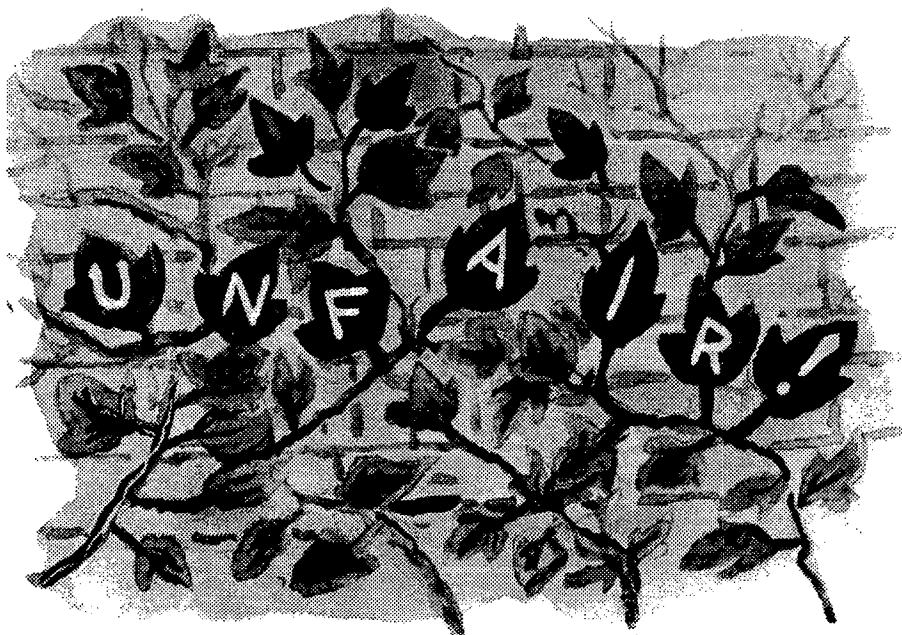
profits, cut costs—to higher education.

With a \$4 billion endowment, Yale is the third richest private university in the country and can't claim to be strapped for cash. Last year, the university earned a whopping 15.7 percent return on its portfolio, but it seems loath to share the wealth. Publicly, President Richard Levin has called for contract negotiations to move "beyond confrontation to problem-solving." But at a luncheon with

undergraduates last spring, he said he would "shut down the university" before yielding to labor concerns.

Recognition of GESO is a key issue in the debate. Although the two recognized unions are allying with graduate students to expand their base and build long-term leverage over the administration, the outlook remains bleak. In contract talks with the two HERE locals, the school has proposed rollbacks in health and pension benefits and lower wages for new workers. But Yale takes its hardest line with graduate students. Like the streamlined private sector (which has increasingly replaced permanent employees with temporary workers), the university is giving the work of costly permanent positions once held by professors to graduate students desperate for money and teaching credentials. Last semester, Yale graduate students spent more time in the classroom than all full-time faculty combined. And while health care fees for graduate students have risen 123 percent in the last five years, their pay remains below the poverty line.

As the largest employer in New Haven, Yale wields power far beyond the school's ivy-covered grounds. Indeed, says student organizer Cindy



Young, the university's labor policies essentially make or break the health of the local community. Yale's unions have stressed that point throughout their campaign.

As organized labor across the country scrambles to regain clout after decades of declining membership, the innovative tactics of Yale's labor coalition have attracted attention far beyond New Haven. If the administration recognizes the students, theirs will be the first legal union at a private U.S. university. "Union membership is up for the first time in 20 years," says Chris Wood of the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute. "And the struggle at Yale reflects a real effort by unions across the country to reach out to new workers in new industries."

—Robert Perkinson

(Robert Perkinson is a member of Yale's Graduate Student Employees Organization.)

civilian rule and human rights. The academy will help overcome the abuses of the past created by the School of the Americas." The new school would use the \$4 million allocated annually to the SOA to train both civilian and military officials and emphasize combat training, civilian control of security forces and support for democracy as well as human rights.

Kennedy introduced the bill (HR 2654) on November 16, the sixth anniversary of the massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the University of Central America in El Salvador. Of the 27 Salvadoran military officers identified as participants by the U.N. Truth Commission, 19 attended the SOA. And among the school's alumni are some of Central America's most egregious human rights abusers, including former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and Salvadoran death squad

organizer Roberto D'Aubuisson.

Although Kennedy's aides are optimistic because the bill already has attracted some 40 co-sponsors, including Republicans Scott Klug of Wisconsin and Peter Torkildsen of Massachusetts, activists remain skeptical about its chances of passage in the current political climate. Bill Spencer, deputy director of the Washington Office on Latin America, pointed out that Kennedy's earlier efforts to shut down the SOA (in October 1993 and May 1994) gained support, but that was before the Republicans flooded Congress.

Nonetheless, other SOA critics welcome the bill as an opportunity to focus attention on the school. "There's no one way to shut down an operation like this," says Father Roy Bourgeois, a Maryknoll priest who has long criticized the school. "But this bill is going to poke the beehive again."

—Peter Zirnltte

PEACE STUDIES

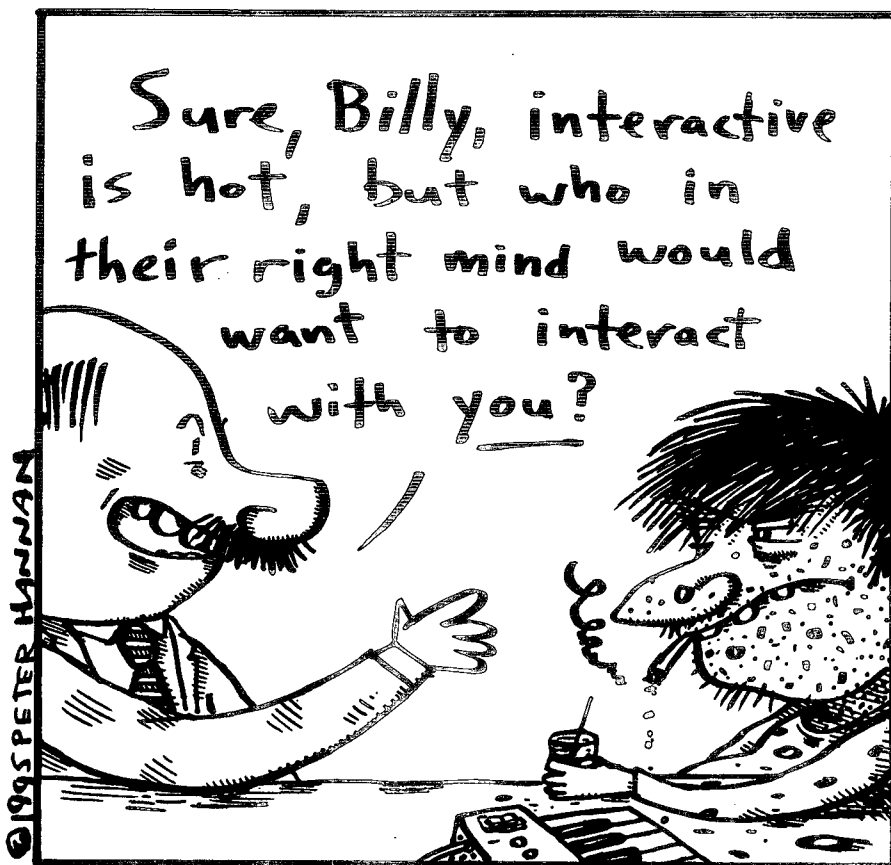
In the Republican-dominated Congress, the push to make Central America a kinder and gentler place is a Sisyphean task. But that hasn't stopped Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-MA) from trying.

After two failed legislative attempts to shut down the U.S. Army's School of the Americas (SOA), which has provided training to some 57,000 Latin American soldiers since it was established 50 years ago, Kennedy is back and armed with a new strategy. Rather than simply closing the Fort Benning, Ga., facility, he has devised a replacement project: the U.S. Academy for Democracy and Civil Military Relations.

"In this post-Cold War era, the school is out of place with our priorities," Kennedy said when he introduced the legislation last month. "We need to train soldiers for peace-keeping missions and teach them to respect

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

CONFRONTING CORPORATE POWER

By Joel Bleifuss

Royal Dutch Shell's complicity in the death of Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa has sparked an international debate over the role transnational corporations play in global politics. Defenders of the corporate system maintain that Shell, like all corporations, is an amoral entity whose sole goal is to make money for shareholders, not to take political positions. Shell's critics, on the other hand, believe that the company must be held accountable for its support of the Nigerian dictatorship. To that end, they have organized a boycott of Shell and are calling for sanctions against the Nigerian government.

Like Nestlé before it, Shell has become the corporation we love to hate. But plenty of other companies deserve the same sort of notoriety. The Council on Economic Priorities (CEP), a New York-based group that works on issues of corporate responsibility, had no trouble finding eight companies worthy of designation as this year's "most environmentally irresponsible corporations." The list, released on November 30, includes five firms that are first-time "dishonorees." They include Stone Container, Pittsburgh-Wheeling Steel, Occidental Petroleum, Dominion Resources and Formosa Plastics-USA.

Of these, Formosa Plastics-USA is the least known and most interesting. The company is a subsidiary of the Formosa Plastics Group, the largest private corporation in Taiwan and the world's largest manufacturer of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. Between 1980 and 1988, Taipei-based Formosa acquired 14 American PVC-makers. With those purchases, Formosa Plastics-USA became the largest PVC manufacturer in the United States, producing more than 2 billion pounds a year. PVC is composed of about 50 percent chlorine, which is a key ingredient of the highly toxic compound dioxin. And for that reason, as the CEP points out, industrial uses of chlorine, especially in the production of PVC, have been targeted for elimination by Greenpeace and other environmental groups.

Formosa's major U.S. plastics factory is in Point Com-

fort, Texas. The plant, built in 1981, is the largest industrial polluter in Calhoun County. And thanks to Formosa, that county now has more toxic chemicals in its land and water than any other county in the nation. Formosa discharges the wastewater from its Point Comfort facility into Cox Creek, which runs directly into the Gulf Coast's Lavaca Bay. According to a 1990 report by the Texas Water Commission, the company's pollution has killed all aquatic life in the once-thriving Cox Creek. And, as local environmentalists point out, the company's wastes flow from the creek to the ocean, where those toxins regularly kill dolphins. In 1992, for example, 209 dolphins died in Lavaca Bay, 80 of them in one month. The EPA and Texas environmental agencies have

repeatedly fined Formosa for polluting the soil, air and water around the Point Comfort plant, but the company seems quite able to take record-breaking penalties in stride.

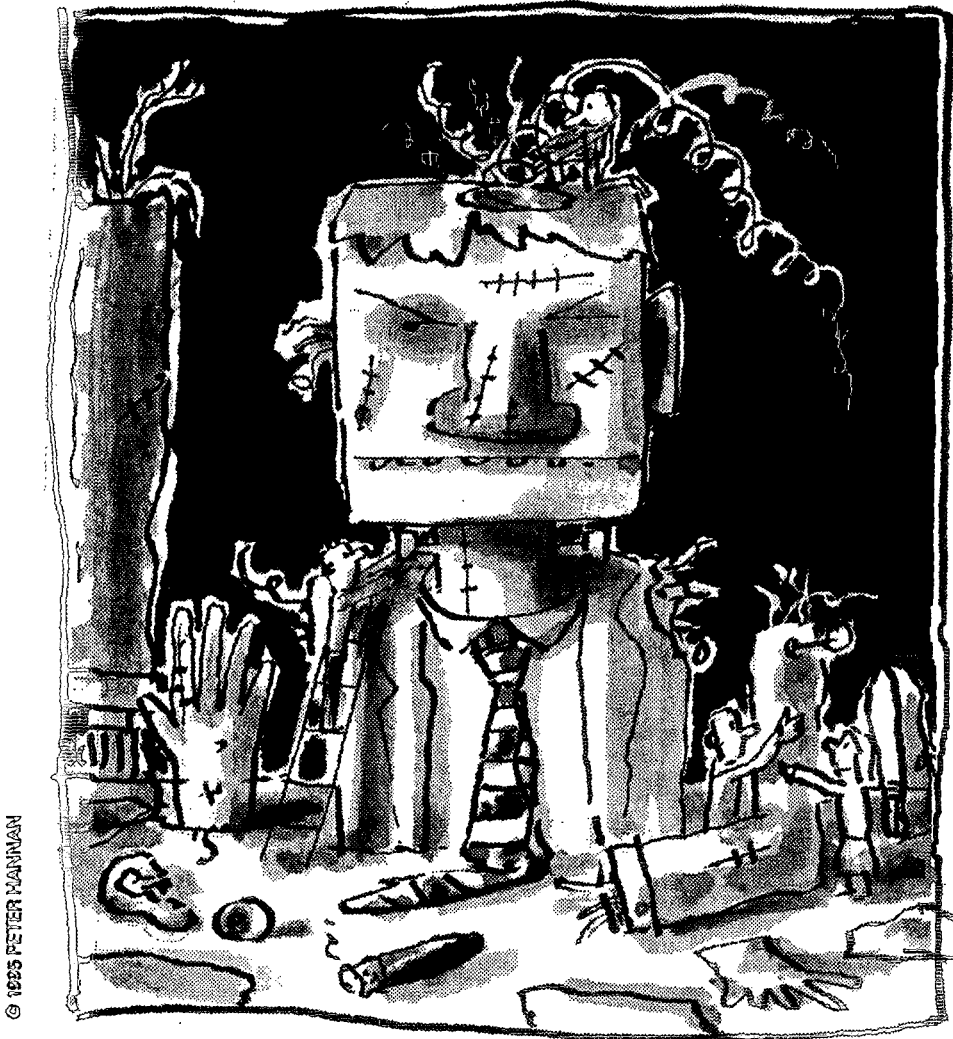
Things are no better in Taiwan. In 1990, 20,000 people demonstrated in a distant suburb of Taipei against Formosa's plans to build an \$8 billion chemical complex next to one of its current facilities, which is a chronic polluter. For 30 years, residents in the area claim to have suffered from acid rain, mercury poisoning, air pollution and contaminated drinking water.

In the coming year, the CEP will put pressure on Formosa and the other listed companies to clean up their act. It can be done. The council reports that five of last year's companies "demonstrated significant environmental improvement" and were consequently de-listed.

Other corporations are more intractable. Three of the corporate polluters cited this year by the CEP are repeat offenders: The Southern Co. (a utility conglomerate), MAXXAM (aluminum and forest products) and Exxon.

Exxon, the third largest U.S. company by sales, has made the CEP's list for the past three years. According to EPA data, Exxon is the oil industry leader when it comes to generating hazardous waste and spilling hazardous material. Further, the company has refused to meet with CEP staff to discuss its environmental record. Then again, why should Exxon care what environmentalists think? It has taken out insurance against damage by pesky public-interest groups. From January 1, 1993 through June 30, 1995, Exxon contributed \$534,425 to help elect members of the U.S. Congress, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington, D.C.-based group that tracks the effect of money on politics. What's more, 94 percent of Exxon's political protection money was pocketed by Republicans.

Despite calls for corporate responsibility from groups such as the CEP, the vast majority of corporate polluters escape the public-interest microscope. Dow Chemical is the largest producer of dioxin in the country. But through a



state-of-the-art public relations campaign, Dow has painted such a pretty picture of itself that consumers rank it among the 10 U.S. firms with the best environmental reputations, according to *American Demographics*.

Fortunately, not everyone has been hoodwinked by corporate PR campaigns. From November 10-12, an overflow crowd of 1,800 gathered in New York City's Riverside Church for a teach-in on politics in a global economy. The conference was sponsored by the International Forum on Globalization, which was founded by representatives of 40 public-interest organizations from 19 countries in 1994—soon after the implementation of NAFTA and the renegotiation of GATT.

Conference coordinator Victor Menotti believes that the new global economy demands that we rethink our approach to politics. "The social movements are in disarray, and people are looking for fresh analysis," says Menotti. "We would like to shift people's attention away from government actions, where it has been focused, and unmask the face of corporate power that is behind those actions. That would help people around the world understand that their pain—their falling wages, their polluted environment, their disinte-

grating community—is linked to the corporations that control the global economy."

To that end, the International Forum on Globalization has developed a detailed, well thought-out guide for citizen action, titled *Dismantling Corporate Rule*. In this 50-page workbook, which comes complete with exercises, the group states that its "ultimate objective is to dismantle the structures of corporate rule, not merely to reform the operations of transnational corporations to make them more accountable and socially responsible." *Dismantling Corporate Rule* proposes that individuals and groups confront multinationals with a five-step program that follows the "the 5 D's"—defining, dissecting, denouncing, disrupting and, finally, dismantling corporate rule.

The process, as charted in the workbook, goes like this: First, define and analyze the political realities that enable corporations to exert so much influence. Second, dissect and examine the different economic sectors—finance, resources, production—in which the system of corporate rule operates. Third, develop strategic positions from which to challenge the system of corporate rule. For exam-

ple, understand that corporate charters, or their equivalent, allow corporations to operate in a specific state or country. Fourth, come up with effective strategies and tactics for action, such as denouncing and challenging the rights of corporations to be granted corporate charters. Fifth, develop and implement alternative policies that dismantle corporate systems and then replace them with democratic structures. For example, revoke corporate charters, or substantially amend those charters to ensure that corporations are prevented from playing a decisive role in determining public policy in the future.

Through 1996, the forum will be sponsoring teach-ins similar to the one held last month in New York in cities across North America, South America and Europe. At those gatherings corporate rule will be "defined," "dissected" and "denounced." Those teach-ins will lead to an international conference in 1997. There, in a yet-to-be-determined city, plans for "disruption" will top the agenda.

Dismantling Corporate Rule can be ordered from the International Forum on Globalization at PO Box 12218, San Francisco, CA 94112-0218, (415) 771-1102, fax (415) 771-1121, e-mail, vmenotti@igc.apc.org.

POLITICS

Theater of the absurd

Despite the partisan posturing of the budget debate, both parties are committed to eviscerating the welfare state.

By Scott McLemee
WASHINGTON

In early September when Senator Bob Dole announced that "this will not be an autumn of compromise," it was something between a prophecy and a threat. A few weeks later, the White House and Congress deadlocked in their effort to hammer out a federal budget for fiscal year 1996. They soon agreed on a continuing resolution that kept the government funded until mid-November, but as the deadline approached, congressional Republicans sent the president an ultimatum in the form of two appropriations bills, each of them carrying provisions that Bill Clinton indicated he wouldn't accept. With his veto on November 13, Clinton initiated the longest shutdown of the federal government in American history. Some 800,000 workers were furloughed—including almost half of all feder-

al employees in the District of Columbia.

In reality, "shutdown" is something of an overstatement. The lapse in funding left most government services to the general public unaffected. Nevertheless, those six days in November occupy a special place in the calendar of recent American politics. The shutdown fell at the midpoint between the 1994 and the 1996 elections. The issues at the center of the budget dispute—health care, social spending, the environment and (of course) taxes—will all return in 1996. And if debate during the shutdown was a sign of things to come, the tone of American political discourse is about to plunge to new lows.

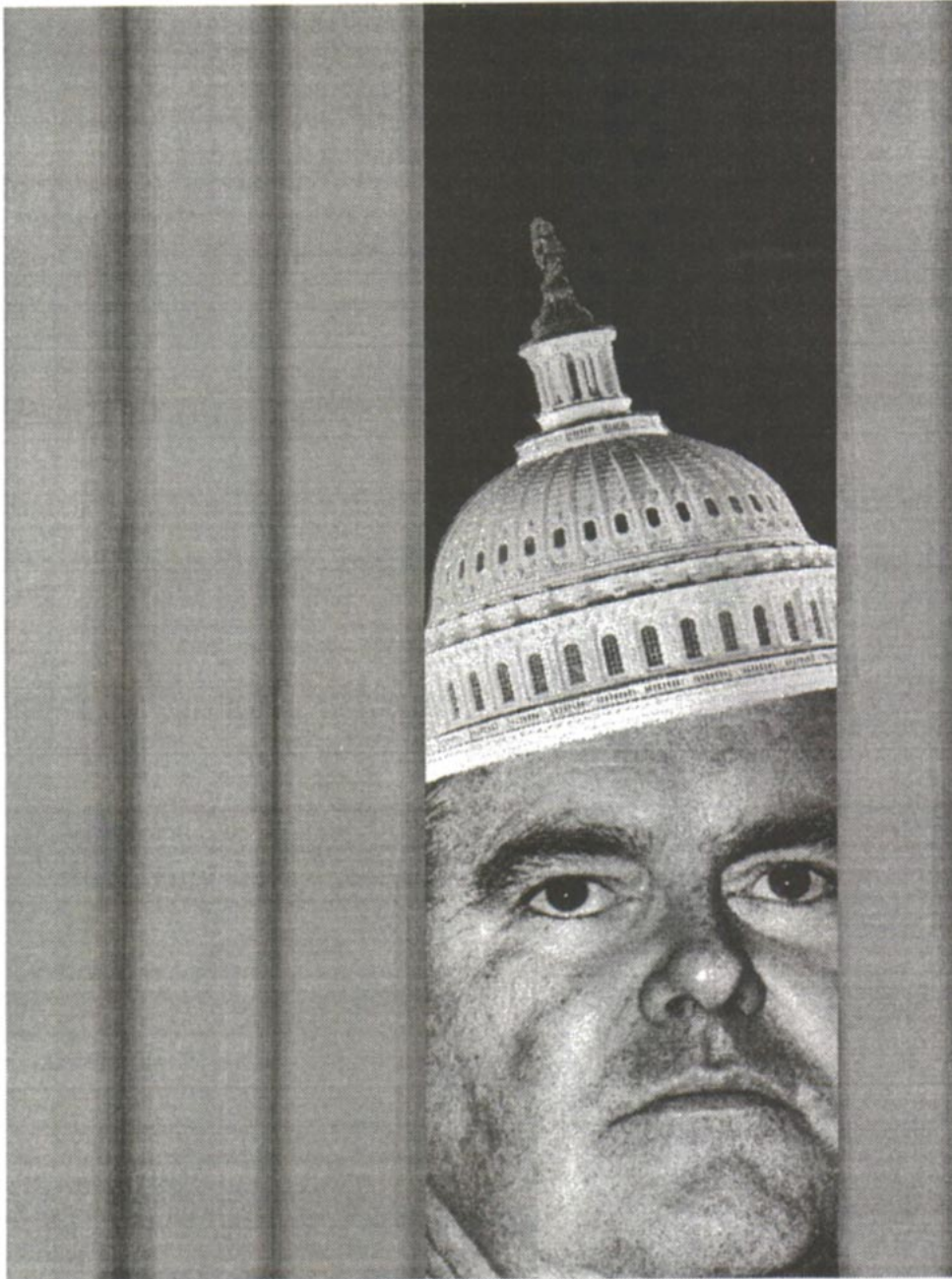
On the floor of the House, Florida Republican John Mica referred to Clinton as "the little bugger." White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta called GOP legislators "terrorists" for attempting to cut Medicare and Medicaid. Newt Gingrich bitterly complained about being asked to leave Air Force One through the back of the plane. In response, House Democrats tried to display a newspaper headline calling Gingrich a "CRYBABY" as a "chart"—useful, apparently, in explaining the source of the budget crisis. It was not a season of bipartisan civility.

The president himself said little, except to reiterate his intention to veto the budget bills that Congress was preparing to send him. And the polls rewarded him for it: Asked who was to blame for the shutdown, 46 percent of the respondents to one survey named the Republicans, while only 27 percent held Clinton responsible. The turning point in the deadlock came not long before Thanksgiving—more precisely, during Newt Gingrich's November 19 appearance on ABC's *This Week with David Brinkley*. There, Gingrich indicated that the key to a compromise was a commitment to balance the budget in seven years. Everything else was negotiable.

The following day, the White House and Congress reached an agreement to reopen the government with funding through December 15. Clinton agreed to try to eliminate the federal deficit by 2002; the Republicans agreed to a review of the economic predictions upon which their proposed cuts were based; and so discussions on the budget could begin again. It was, as Gingrich said, a "great historic achievement."

All of which will be ancient history by the time December 15 rolls around. That date could bring a federal budget for fiscal year 1996. Or there may be yet another interruption of government services. (As *In These Times* went to press, both Republican and Democratic Party leaders were heatedly discussing the size of the negotiating table they intend to use.) But to understand the current budget debate, it may be useful to look back in time:

COLLAGE: PETER HANNAN, NEWT PHOTO © SMIA PHOTO / IMPACT VISUALS



namely to the year 1980. For that is when the shutdown of November 1995 became possible, even inevitable.

From 1960 to 1980, the federal government repeatedly faced much the same situation that confronted it this fall. That is, the fiscal year started without a budget in place to guide spending. Indeed, such gaps were routine. According to a 1981 Government Accounting Office report, "85 percent of the appropriations bills for Federal agencies [during the period from 1961 to 1980] passed after the start of the fiscal year." Directors of government agencies assumed that funding would be restored in due course. In the meantime, they went about their work. It was no big deal.

That changed in April 1980, when the attorney general's office declared the practice illegal. "[D]uring periods of

'lapsed appropriations,' no funds may be expended except as necessary to bring about the orderly termination of an agency's functions," the attorney general's office decided. Until the federal budget was in place, unfunded agencies had to shut down. Throughout the intervening years, this has happened nine times—for periods ranging from half a day to a weekend.

It was, again, no big deal. But 1980 also marked the election of Ronald Reagan, who promised both a balanced budget and substantial tax cuts. Of course, balancing the budget while cutting taxes requires an enormous reduction in expenditures; and though Congress was happy to pass the tax cuts, a comparable level of spending cuts was much less agreeable. People liked the government services they were receiving just fine; and the Pentagon liked its blank checks.

The result, of course, was the fastest and largest surge of federal debt in American history. Yet the debt had its uses. As free-market theorist Friedrich von Hayek remarked in 1985, the vast deficits served nicely as a long-term tool for dismantling the welfare state. "Reagan thinks it is impossible to persuade Congress that expenditures must be reduced," Hayek explained, "unless one creates deficits so large that absolutely everyone

becomes convinced that no more money can be spent." Which brings us back to 1995.

Recently Newt Gingrich was asked how the Republicans had settled on a required period of seven years to balance the federal budget. His mysterious answer: "intuition." But a cursory look at the GOP plan to eliminate the deficit suggests even deeper mysteries: It seeks to balance the budget through still more tax reductions. Between 1996 and 2002, the Republicans propose to cut taxes by \$245 billion, a figure that includes cuts in capital gains taxes, reductions in estate taxes (benefiting only heirs to estates worth more than \$600,000) and the eventual elimination of a luxury tax on cars worth more than \$32,000.

In addition, federal revenues would be lost by GOP plans to initiate a tax credit of \$500 per child for families earning up to \$110,000 annually. Of course, a third of American children live below the poverty line, which is too bad for their parents: Because they don't earn enough to be taxed, the per-child refund wouldn't do them any good.

The Republicans argue that the tax reductions will free up large sums of money for private investment and help spur the economy. But the proposed \$245 billion in tax cuts is likely to produce little economic stimulus. As *Investor's Business Daily* explained, "The total amount of gross domestic product expected over those seven years is more than \$60 trillion. So the tax cuts are equal to 0.4% of the economy."

The upshot of this schizophrenic policy of balancing the budget while sharply reducing tax revenues will be spending cuts on a grand scale. Under Republican projections, Medicare would lose \$270 billion over seven years, while Medicaid (which primarily benefits nursing homes and the poor) would be cut \$163 billion. Government-backed loans to college students would be cut by about \$5 billion over the next seven years.

These programs were, until recently, virtually untouchable. That this has changed is a tribute to the efficacy of the deficit as a tool for dismantling social programs. But, Hayek notwithstanding, "absolutely everyone" is not yet "convinced that no more money can be spent." In opposing the Republican budget, Clinton has been able to project himself as the defender of Medicare. Because the president's budget assumes a higher rate of growth in the economy between 1996 and 2002 than does the Republican proposal, it requires fewer cuts in social services (some \$876 billion less) to reach a balanced budget.

Yet on closer inspection, the gap between Clinton and the Republicans begins to dwindle—as the business press has repeatedly emphasized. "How radical is the GOP budget?" asked *Investor's Business Daily*. "Not very," it answered, "since Clinton has offered similar plans." For instance, the paper explained, the president "wanted Medicare to grow at less than 5 percent a year after 1999. The GOP wants to leave the growth rate at about 6.5 percent." In late November, the *Financial Times* of London wrote that "Mr. Clinton has at last hit on an effective strategy for taking on the Republicans over the budget. First, cede the most important principles to your opponents. And second, earn maximum political capital by battling in a principled manner over the details." But how do those "details" translate into such vast gaps in plans to cut spending? The answer lies in the effort to project a balanced budget seven years down the line—which involves some imaginative number-crunching.

"The discussion gives these figures an air of precision which they don't have," explains Todd Schaffer of the Economic Policy Institute. "It's a big crapshoot. For one thing, none of the projections really accounts for a recession. And it's almost impossible not to have a recession during that period." But maintaining adequate funding for federal programs during bad times is not the issue of the day. Reducing the deficit is. And in the resolution ending the November shutdown, the president agreed, at least in principle, to the GOP's deficit-reduction timetable.

Ultimately, November's suspension of government funding is estimated to have cost taxpayers around \$120 million per day—a figure representing lost revenues and diminished productivity, but omitting the intangible damage to morale among federal workers. Still, the shutdown generated more media coverage than real pain. If you needed to get a passport, or apply for Social Security, or look at the Grand Canyon, there was some inconvenience. But the Veterans Administration and Social Security Administration sent out checks, and the post office delivered them. And if another shutdown should take place this month, it would be on a still smaller scale.

So far, the public has treated the whole matter as one more Beltway spectacle. In a sense, it was. And judged strictly by poll results, the impasse benefited Clinton—or rather, proved less harmful to him. In a *Washington Post/ABC News* survey that asked who was "playing politics" with the showdown, nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt the Republicans were, while just over half said the president was.

But those numbers scarcely measure the longer-term significance of the dispute, which has played itself out as another episode in the use of the deficit to dismantle state regulation of the economy. As Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) said during the shutdown, "If this goes on long enough, we'll know whether some of these agencies should exist." And *Barron's* fairly gloated during the impasse. "Nearly 800,000 federal workers have been officially declared nonessential," the financial weekly exulted, "including 2 out of 3 employees in the Department of Commerce, 9 out of 10 employees in the Department of Education, and 99 out of 100 in the Department of Housing and Urban Development."

The wholesale elimination of federal agencies is a dream near and dear to many of the new House Republicans—who are fondly referred to around Washington as the "Hezbollah." And in the absence of an alternative agenda, the Hezbollah will continue to determine the tenor of future budget discussions. The nation's safety net may shrink and tear, and market forces may gain free reign over society. But as might be expected when great power passes into the hands of a fundamentalist force, many who fall short of the true faith—in this case, the vast majority of Americans who will lose access to critical financial support and federal services—will become hostage to the GOP's rancor. The prophetic logic of Hayek, in all its painful clarity, will prevail. Or, as Herbert Hoover, another spiritual forerunner of the Gingrich revolutions, remarked in 1931, "Nothing is more important than balancing the budget."

16

FINANCE

Dirty dealing

*A scandal on
the Nasdaq
stock exchange
reveals
the routine
manipulations
made in the
name of the
free market.*

By J.W. Mason
NEW YORK

In a stentorian new advertising campaign, Nasdaq has dubbed itself "the stock market for the next hundred years." And many economists and business writers have agreed: As recently as two years ago, they were warning that America's more closely regulated stock markets, the New York and American exchanges, faced extinction unless they emulated their junior competitor. But in the last year and a half, financial pundits have reconsidered that prognosis: Nasdaq (as the National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quote system is universally known) has been dogged by meticulously documented accusations of collusion and price manipulation among its dealers.

Normally, allegations involving the theft or misappropriation of hundreds of millions of dollars would be front-page news,

but the Nasdaq scandal has largely escaped public scrutiny. Although the sums involved are far smaller than the headline-grabbing billions that evaporated at Britain's Barings Bank and Japan's Daiwa Bank earlier this year, the implications are more alarming. For the misconduct on the Nasdaq exchange stems not from the schemes of one rogue trader, but rather from the systematic bilking of investors by market insiders. Nasdaq spokesmen have defended these practices by mouthing the standard neoliberal pieties about letting competition regulate markets; the exchange even hired a Nobel laureate to bolster its argument. But the facts of the case show that today's increasingly complex financial markets need more, not less, regulation.

At the heart of the controversy is one of the features that has endeared Nasdaq to free-marketeers: its relative lack of regulatory oversight. Most stock trading in the United States takes place on "auction" exchanges. On the New York and American stock exchanges, buyers and sellers trade with each

other via a specialist who deals in the stock of a single firm. The specialist acts something like an auctioneer, matching up orders to buy and sell his or her particular stock at various prices. While specialists monopolize the trading of their particular stock on the exchange floor, they are closely regulated to ensure that they provide a "fair and orderly market."

Nasdaq, on the other hand, is a dealer market, with up to several dozen market makers—dealers that maintain large inventories of shares—handling trades in each stock. Unlike the specialists at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and the American Stock Exchange, Nasdaq market makers regularly trade for their own accounts as well as for their clients. In fact, buyers and sellers typically trade with market makers rather than with each other. And, unlike specialists, Nasdaq market makers are subject to only cursory regulatory scrutiny. The competition between market makers, it is presumed, prevents any one of them from making excessive profits at the expense of investors.

But the same features of the dealer market that are supposed to ensure fairness and efficiency—multiple market makers trading stocks on their own account—also create a serious conflict of interest: If the specialists at the NYSE are like referees at a sporting event, Nasdaq market makers are more like the house at a casino. The earnings of NYSE specialists are simply determined by the volume of trade, whereas Nasdaq market makers depend for their profits on getting a good price for their stocks—and a good price for the market makers is by definition a bad price for the investors with whom they trade. The only thing preventing the dealers from increasing their spreads and gouging investors is the competition between the couple dozen mar-

ket makers in each stock—and competition is a slender reed to hang fairness on, especially considering that the market makers have shared backgrounds and interests and are in constant communication.

The relative merits of dealer versus auction markets have been debated for years. But this polite academic discussion turned into a high-stakes legal grudge match in May of last year, when two finance professors, Vanderbilt University's William Christie and Ohio State University's Paul Schultz, announced the findings of an article they had written for the *Journal of Finance*. In the course of research into stock pricing on the Nasdaq exchange, they had discovered that many of the most actively traded stocks were never or almost never quoted at odd eighths. (Stock prices in this country are given in units of eighths of a dollar, that is, 12 and a half cents. An odd-eighth price is simply one that ends in an odd eighth, for instance, 10 and one-eighth, 10 and three-eighths, and so on.) This meant that the minimum spread—the market maker's profit per share on each transaction—was 25 cents rather than 12 and a half cents, the minimum if all eighths were used. Suppressing odd-eighth quotes increased market makers' profits by only 12 and a half cents per share traded. But in a market that sees 50 million shares of an actively traded stock change hands each day, the total potential gains were staggering.

Christie and Schultz, along with their colleagues, considered and rejected various innocuous explanations for the pattern they had found. None of the "fundamentals," the economic factors that are normally expected to determine stock prices, could explain why these stocks, and only these stocks, were traded exclusively in even eighths. And clearly such dramatic results could not be the result of chance. "It seemed inconceivable that almost 60 market makers simply forgot to use one half of the possible price fractions," Christie and Schultz noted recently in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. "In the absence of other plausible explanations, we concluded that our results most likely reflected an understanding or implicit agreement among the market makers to avoid the use of odd-eighth price fractions when quoting these stocks. The significance of this agreement is that the inside spread was prevented from narrowing to under \$0.25, thereby inflating trading profits above those that would have been generated in the absence of this policy." In other words, when it came to America's second-largest stock market, talk about the free play of market forces was so much cant. Market makers were altering prices in their favor through collusion and manipulation, and two finance professors had the statistics to prove it.

Reaction to Christie and Schultz's bombshell was swift. A deluge of newspaper articles appeared, beginning with a May 26, 1994 piece in the *Los Angeles Times* detailing the accusations. Soon stories began to surface about dealers who had been threatened or harassed for quoting odd-eighths. Institutional and individual investors alike filed lawsuits, which were consolidated into one class-action suit in September of last year. Meanwhile, the Justice Department's Antitrust Division had begun a large-scale investigation of Nasdaq trading practices. All this attention provoked a curious response from the market makers in a number of the stocks Christie and Schultz had written about: Numerous stocks that had for two years been quoted exclusively in even eighths began to see odd-eighth prices appear regularly. Spreads—and therefore market makers' profits—in these stocks dropped by as much as 50 percent. Once again, economic fundamentals were powerless to explain the shift. Now anyone who wanted to deny collusion among the market makers had to face another problem. If market makers were unable to coordinate their prices, how did they coordinate this drop?

For their part, the market makers insisted that, well, they just sort of liked to give quotes in even eighths. "It is just a habit from the years before the machines," the head of one trading firm explained, while another insisted that the size of spreads in the stocks his firm made markets in had "nothing to do with collusion. It has a lot to do with tradition and the avoidance of strange-looking quotations."

The only effect of such arguments was, as Christie and Schultz drily noted, "to reassure us that we hadn't overlooked an obvious explanation."

With pressure mounting to justify market makers' anomalous pricing, it was clear that Nasdaq required professional spin control. So they hired the best in the business: Merton Miller, winner of the 1990 Nobel Prize in Economics, who supplements his professor's salary at the University of Chicago with well-paid research work for the consulting firm Lexecon. In a paper he presented to a conference at Vanderbilt University, Miller offered various possible explanations for the exclusive use of even-eighth quotes: Maybe it wasn't worth the effort to negotiate prices down to the eighth, just as homebuyers don't negotiate the price down to the penny; or, maybe the quoted price was merely informational, and the real price would be negotiated later using all price fractions. As far as Nasdaq was concerned, its market makers had been found innocent. But soon economists who weren't being paid \$500 an hour for their opinions began picking holes in Miller's proposed explanations. "A lot of

When it came to America's second-largest stock market, talk about the free play of market forces was so much cant. Market makers were altering prices in their favor through collusion and manipulation.

people thought it was a paid announcement" for Nasdaq, one finance professor said of the paper's reception.

While Miller "conceptualized the problem in interesting ways," an article in *Investment Dealers Digest* opined, his paper "failed to come up with much hard evidence" to support his arguments. But hard evidence was not really central to Miller's paper. Rather, it invoked a theoretical, almost theological, conviction that collusion just could not take place in a stock market. More than 400 firms act as market makers on Nasdaq, he pointed out; surely competition between them must "compete away any profits created by a hypothetical agreement to quote higher spreads, making it unlikely that such an agreement would ever be made." And even if 400 market makers could somehow make and enforce an agreement among themselves, Miller still held what he considered a trump card: The very success of Nasdaq proves that its pricing is fair. Nasdaq "has been very successful at attracting new listings, retaining old listings and promoting transactions," he wrote. "This success is powerful evidence that Nasdaq provides services that investors want at competitive prices."

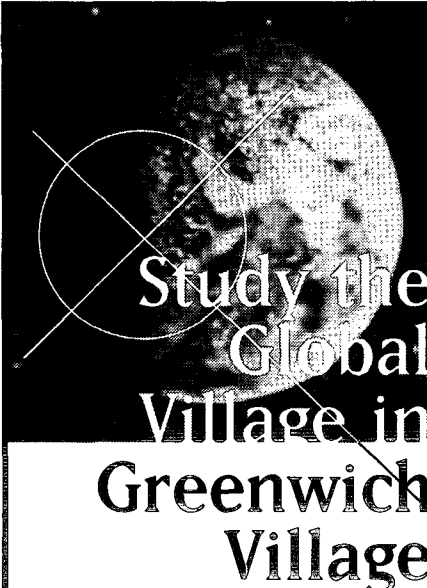
So what's the bottom line? Is Nasdaq the Great Train Robbery of the '90s? Well, the amounts lost by investors were very large—in the hundreds of millions at least. The exact amount, and whether you want to call it robbery, is necessarily a subject of legal, and perhaps metaphysical, debate, hinging as it does on the question of what prices would have been in the absence of collusion. In any case, no one lost their savings for retirement or the kids' college tuition from the market makers' duplicity; the losses were spread over so many investors that no individual lost much, and anyway, it's not the poor and the vulnerable who find time to play around with stocks.

But in another sense, the importance of the Nasdaq scandal is already clear, and Miller is not so wrong after all: Mainstream economic theory does say that collusion among stock dealers is impossible. Economists, as a rule, like to talk about markets and competition in the abstract, without too much concern for the workings of the real world. Nevertheless, there is a widely shared consensus that here on this imperfect Earth stock markets are the closest we can come to the ideal. If the theoretical conditions for perfect competition—perfectly rational actors, futures markets for all commodities, minimal transaction costs—apply anywhere, they apply here. For this reason, the debate over whether Nasdaq market makers manipulated stock prices is more a philosophical one

than anything else, a question of conflicting paradigms rather than conflicting evidence. For those who see collusion, cooperation and collective action as ubiquitous features of economic life, the evidence for collusion at Nasdaq is more than sufficient, while for those on the other side, such as Miller and Lexecon, the possibility that nominally competing economic agents would cooperate is so far-fetched that all alternatives must be proven 100 percent false before it can be accepted. This is much too big a question to settle on the basis of one stock-trading scandal.

But consider the conclusion of the late French historian Fernand Braudel, whose *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century* is as thorough a study as has yet been written on the early history of capitalism: He described capitalism as the "anti-market," arguing that the stringent regulations that hedged markets throughout the early modern period were invariably aimed at creating a real confrontation of supply and demand, while the capitalists who constantly tried to circumvent them could make really big profits only by artificially manipulating or controlling prices. Today, when "the market" enjoys an ideological dominance it hasn't seen in a century, when even committed leftists find themselves talking about "market socialism," Braudel's judgment and the lessons of Nasdaq are well worth keeping in mind.

J.W. Mason is a researcher for the *Left Business Observer*, a monthly newsletter published in New York.



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E N V I R O N M E N T

The heat is on

*The early
effects of global
warming may
be upon us—
and they are
sickening.*

By Will Nixon

The warming climate of Colombia over the past five years may not call to mind the splashy excess of *Waterworld*, Kevin Costner's movie depicting a dystopian world order after the melting of the polar ice caps. But Colombia has suffered the mundane afflictions of drought and disease on a devastating scale. The drought, which lasted from 1991 to 1993, drained the reservoirs behind hydroelectric dams low enough to cause regular power outages. Since 1994, the country has been unusually hot and, now, wet—conditions that set the stage for outbreaks of tropical diseases.

In June, temperatures hit 107 degrees for several days in the northern state of La Guarija, spawning a toxic bloom of algae that killed 350 tons of fish in

Ciénaga Grande, one of Colombia's richest lagoons. In August, normally a dry month, 16 inches of rain fell in the state, 16 times higher than average. Mosquitoes soon bred in pools, so by September Venezuelan equine encephalitis had spread across La Guarija, sending 12,400 people into health clinics with the disease, which causes an inflammation of membranes around the brain and produces severe headaches, fever, vomiting and, occasionally, death. As many as 32,000 others in the region were also infected. This year La Guarija has endured two outbreaks of dengue fever (also known as break-bone fever because of the pain it causes in the joints) and has seen its first 50 cases of leptospirosis, a potentially fatal fever that apparently spread through the poor sections of the city of Barranquilla.

"Colombia is not alone in this nightmare," writes the Harvard School of Public Health's Dr. Paul Epstein in the British medical journal *The Lancet*. In the past few years, Epstein and other medical researchers have been studying the links between disease outbreaks and climate changes, especially the erratic extremes of heat and precipitation

plaguing countries such as Colombia, Honduras, India and South Africa. For years, scientists have speculated about the potential side-effects of global warming: islands sinking below the rising ocean waves or ecosystems migrating up to six miles per year to stay within their preferred climate zone. But the research of Epstein and his colleagues suggests that some nightmares are already descending upon us.

"From fossil records of past climate changes, we know that mosquitoes move much faster than trees and shrubs and grassland and bears," Epstein says. The Aegis aegypti mosquito that carries dengue fever has climbed through its traditional altitude barrier of 1,000 meters to 2,200 meters in Colombia and 1,350 meters in Costa Rica, where it hurdled the central mountains and spread the disease across the western side of the country. Mosquitoes, rodents and algae, which all carry diseases, are also "opportunistic species" that invade disturbed ecosystems, such as those hit by droughts, floods and heat waves, well before the larger animals that prey upon them will follow. Epstein has linked the cholera epidemic that killed several thousand Latin Americans in 1991 to shifts in the El Niño current that created plankton blooms carrying the cholera bacteria. He also contends that the plague that struck Surat, India, in late 1994 can be traced to scorching summer weather, which left thousands of dead animals, followed by heavy monsoons that helped breed deadly mosquitoes.

Another recent, influential study links global warming

to the spread of malaria. The 1994 report by Research for Man and the Environment, a government-supported institute in the Netherlands, estimated that a warming of 4.8 degrees by 2100 could double the population of malarial mosquitoes in the tropics and increase their number by tenfold in temperate regions such as the United States. They could add 50 to 80 million new malaria cases to the 300 million that already occur each year. All told, tropical diseases such as malaria, schistosomiasis, sleeping sickness, dengue and yellow fever infect 600 million people each year and kill 2 million. Such illnesses have long been freakishly rare in the United States, but the projected increase in malarial mosquitoes could herald their return: This year witnessed an outbreak of 13 cases of dengue fever in Texas.

In recent months, global warming has returned from scientific publications to the front page of the *New York Times*. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC), a loose consortium of 2,500 scientists and policy-makers set up under the auspices of the U.N., has been releasing new reports confirming fears that the global climate will warm over the next century. The panel stressed that human pollution will intensify the natural fluctuations of the climate. These reports may imply more consensus among scientists than actually exists, since the scientific study of climate change is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, breakthroughs in the computer modeling of climate change are allowing scientists to produce increasingly accurate assessments of the future.

The climate models work by synthesizing data from the study of ocean currents, atmospheric gases and other phenomena to create complex equations that can account for historical weather patterns. Those equations are then used to predict future climate patterns. In the past, the models have had trouble getting recent history right. Since the dawn of the industrial age there has been a marked

increase in the levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which trap sunlight within the atmosphere. Older climate models assumed that as the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere rose, temperature levels would rise accordingly. But temperatures have not risen as rapidly in the 20th



century as the older models predicted. It turns out that those models failed to include a critical variable: the sulfur dioxide pollution produced by industry. Sulfur dioxide, unlike carbon dioxide, creates an invisible canopy of particles that reflects sunlight back into space and thus *cools* industrial regions. That phenomenon offsets some of the warming created by greenhouse gases. By compensating for that factor, the new models more accurately mimic historical weather patterns, (which convinces many scientists that they are now on target for the future).

Some critics still question the reliability of computer models, arguing that they rely on historical records of sulfur emissions and other phenomena that are spotty at best. Even so, researchers are coming to realize that history shows that, if anything, the climate can swing far more unpredictably and dramatically than they or their current models have supposed: The last ice age ended not over the course of centuries but, as Epstein points out, over three to seven years.

Barring such sudden catastrophes, the best research predicts a steady acceleration of global warming. One IPCC scientist, Tom Wigley of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, predicts that the global temperature will increase by 3.6 degrees over the next century, four times more than in the past 100 years, and sea levels will rise by 20 inches, four to five times higher than in the past century. Meanwhile, the IPCC now predicts that the global mean temperature will increase by 1.5 to 6.3 degrees, while the sea level will rise by six to 37 inches by the year 2100.

The U.S. Climate Action Network, a coalition of environmental groups, released a report in early November outlining a host of future problems that could arise if the IPCC projections hold true. Rising sea levels would erase many Eastern beaches, flood much of the Mississippi delta and create higher tides that would wash over the Galveston, Texas, seawall in a major storm. Ocean waters could also flood wetlands and mud flats that now provide valu-

able breeding grounds for Gulf shrimp, Chesapeake Bay softshell clams and many other fish, shellfish and birds. Rising temperatures could threaten certain trees in our forests that don't adapt well to change, such as New England's maples, oaks, beeches and hemlocks. Human heat deaths like those that plagued the Midwest this summer would also increase dramatically.

Of course, the Republican Congress greets these scenarios as so much more apocalyptic doomsaying from environmental cranks. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), head of the House Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment, has called it "at best" an "unproven" phenomenon and "at worst ... liberal claptrap, trendy, but soon to go out of style in our Newt Congress." On November 16, his subcommittee held hearings that marshaled a host of skeptics, including Patrick Michaelis, who publishes the *World Climate Report*, which is funded by the Western Fuels Association. Rohrabacher himself enjoys cozy relations with polluting industries: He collected at least \$18,000 from transportation and energy companies in his 1994 re-election campaign.

Recently, House and Senate conferees agreed to cut \$55 million from the administration's request of \$137 million for the EPA's Climate Change Action Plan, a hodgepodge of voluntary energy-efficiency programs that already seemed inadequate to meet the president's stated goal of reducing the country's greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000. President Clinton has indicated that he will veto the appropriations bill that includes these cuts.

What will it take to slow global warming? International climate negotiators are now preparing a protocol to be ready by the middle of 1997 that may renew the commitment of countries that originally agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The discussion ranges between two options, says Henry Jacoby, a co-director of MIT's Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change. The industrialized countries may again promise to reduce their carbon emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000, which only a few European countries may now accomplish, or they may grow bolder and accept the proposal from the Alliance of Small Island States to reduce their emissions by 20 percent by 2005.

But even if the more dramatic goals are enacted, Jacoby says, such a measure will have little impact on warming in the next century, as the rest of the world rushes to industrialize. Greenpeace's Steve Kretzmann points out that political leaders have yet to face up to the full implications of global warming. "In order to reduce carbon emissions by 60 to 80 percent, we need to begin discussing the phaseout of fossil fuels," he says. "Everyone in the Clinton administration and elsewhere is still playing around at the margins."

Will Nixon is a freelance journalist in New York City.

B L A C K A M E R I C A

The national question

In the wake of October's Million Man March, black progressives are on the defensive. Though their commentary on the march ranged from the cautious to the caustic, leftists could not deny that the march provoked some of the most serious soul-searching mainstream black America has seen in decades. The ascendance of march organizer Louis Farrakhan, and the black nationalist strain that he represents, has left many progressive African-Americans in a dilemma. No longer able simply to ignore Farrakhan's more odious tendencies, they have been left either to throw grenades from the movement's margins or to devise more effective ways to tame the man and his constituency.

African-American progressives are struggling to make sense of black nationalism's resurgence.

By Salim Muwakkil

Some black intellectuals, such as Northwestern professor and *Progressive* magazine columnist Adolph Reed, mince no words in expressing their contempt. "Farrakhan is a fascist, and he would be if there were no white people on the planet," Reed wrote in the *Village Voice*. "His vision for black America is authoritarian, theocratic, homophobic and, like nationalisms everywhere, saturated in patriarchal ideology." Reed relates a friend's quip that the march was the first demonstration in history in which people gathered to protest themselves, noting that Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI) reprises, albeit in a more vicious way, the more dubious principles of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Machine. "Farrakhan's conventionally black nationalist 'do-for-self, can't-look-to-government, develop-our-own communities' line," Reed continued, "meshes perfectly with the bipartisan right-wing consensus about social policy and civil rights enforcement—just as Booker T.'s version of the same line legitimized the bipartisan consensus to restore white supremacy in the South."

Whatever its merits with respect to the NOI, Reed's sweeping condemnation crudely devalues a venerable tradition of

black nationalist thought and ignores the special concerns with identity that have been thrust on African-Americans by slavery's legacy. It's a mistake all too common among both black and white progressives. But in recent years, most African-American progressives have come to an ideological rapprochement with black nationalism. Cornel West, Michele Wallace, Henry Louis Gates, Manning Marable and Barbara Ransby have all acknowledged its progressive potential, cultural rationale and timeless attraction. To deny these qualities requires a myopic reading of nationalism's long history in black America. In fact, writes John McCartney in his 1992 book, *Black Power Ideologies*, "The first movement that had as its purpose the eradication of injustices toward African-Americans was a movement that in contemporary language would be classified as Black Nationalist and Separatist."

McCartney is referring to the American Colonization Movement, a group organized by Paul Cuffee, a free black who settled 30 African-Americans in Sierra Leone in 1815. The motivation of this project was not merely to remove slaves from the land of their oppressors—but to revitalize their culture as well. In addition to severing all ancestral links, slavery taught African-Americans to hate their ancestral identity. The nationalist project was an attempt to fill the cultural void left by the demise of that identity. But if such grand schemes throughout history have foundered, black nationalists are right to point out

that the spirit of self-hatred, instilled long ago by slave-masters, still stalks our inner cities, taking its terrible toll of fratricide and fear.

"Whenever there is a conjunction of certain social forces and political factors, there is also the space for a resurgence of nationalist sympathies," says Manning Marable, professor of history and political science and director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University. "When both major political parties turn against the perceived interests of blacks; when the capitalist economy is expanding but the material conditions for black Americans are not; and when the mainstream middle-class black leadership temporarily loses its influence and hegemony; when all these factors are present we'll see a resurgence in black nationalism."

Of course, the persistence of black nationalism hardly justifies its faults. As Reed observes, all nationalisms tend to be vulnerable to fascist romanticism. Nationalism's obsession with "centering" identity is maddening to those critical theorists who want to "deconstruct" and historicize our social context—to demonstrate once and for all that race and ethnicity are social constructions with no inherent validity. If black nationalism dismays white progressives, who regard the decentering of our identities as the best means to creating a larger human family, for black progressives the dilemma is excruciating. It seems increasingly difficult to reconcile the principled belief in racial identity's provisional reality with the psychological need for a reconstructed black identity.

"There is also a social conservative aspect to nationalism that we need to keep at bay," explains Barbara Ransby, political science professor and director of DePaul University's Center for African-American Research. "While aspects of nationalism are very progressive," she says, "those are not the aspects I see being stressed during, and in the wake of, the Million Man March. Instead, what I hear are echoes of the white right being repeated in our own communities." For example, Ransby finds the march's "atonement" theme a problematic expression of guilt, a reservation with which even sympathetic observers agree. "That concept did smack too much of 'blaming the victim,'" says Clarence Lusane, editor of the Washington, D.C.-based newsletter *Black Political Agenda*.

Lusane also found the event's overall religious focus a little disturbing. Considering the way the NOI has used religious zeal and pretensions to righteousness to justify jackbooted thuggery, Farrakhan's potential allies should pause to consider the extent to which his organization has changed. Before the death of patriarch Elijah Muhammad in 1975, tales were rife of errant NOI members or black critics turning up as victims in gruesome murders. And there's no doubt among serious observers that members of the group's Newark Mosque were Malcolm X's assassins. There have been one or two violent incidents since Farrakhan revived the group in the late '70s, but, by and large, disputes within the NOI have grown more

restrained. While groups with "divine" leadership are always susceptible to theological excesses, isolation from the mainstream tended to exaggerate the NOI's more extreme practices. With Farrakhan pursuing new relationships with mainstream black groups, however, such excesses are less likely to be tolerated.

"Clearly there are many ways in which we can unite with the black nationalists," Marable says. "In the struggle against drugs in our community, there are many places we can join forces; in the attempt to build strong black institutions and various cooperatives that could provide goods and services to our community; in fighting against black-on-black crime. In short, there is a basis for a principled, operational unity between black progressives and black nationalists."

But Marable is quick to add that such a relationship wouldn't mute his criticisms. "I still take a strong stance against homophobia, misogyny, anti-Semitism and any other reactionary attitudes with which any nationalists may be saddled," he says. "However, we just can't say that a million black people are dupes of some nationalist magician. That gathering on October 16 meant something profound. It represented broadly shared feelings of anguish, a desperate sense of urgency and a definite spirit of nationalism. If black progressives spend their time arguing theory on the sidelines, divorced from the passions of the people, they will become even more irrelevant than they currently seem to be."



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NEW WORLD ORDER

Gorbachev in the global village

The former Soviet leader launches a career as a New Age toastmaster.

By G. Pascal Zachary

To consider the peculiar and sadly anticlimactic career of Mikhail Gorbachev is to marvel at one man's will to carry on. Having almost single-handedly dissolved the Soviet Union and ended the Cold War, Gorbachev is now a pariah in his own country.

But even if Gorbachev does not despair of his earthly trials, he must have been sorely tempted in late September, when he was subjected to the plaintive whine of pop singer John Denver. Invited to open the four-day "State of the World Forum" sponsored by the San Francisco-based Gorbachev Foundation, the normally chirpy Denver summoned the appropriate gravitas to eulogize Gorbachev with a chorus of: "All this joy, all this sorrow, all this promise, all this pain/ Such is life, such is being, such is spirit, such is love."

Denver wisely left Gorbachev's summit straight-

away, flying to Japan for a first-class gig. Gorbachev wasn't so lucky.

Ostensibly a convocation of a "global braintrust" that might chart a "third way" between the excesses of capitalist and communist economic models, the forum more likely left its participants fearing there was no way out. The forum's list of speakers, while it sported a few worthies, was top-heavy with washed-up politicians, seminar-circuit charlatans and best-selling blowhards. And, unfortunately, Denver's bland existentialism set the tone. Gorbachev himself, bemused, rambling and absurdly out of place as the figurehead of a small foundation, was left only to wonder at his personal eclipse, both in Russian politics and the New World Order.

If the conclave lacked cohesion, it was not for lack of ambition. In fact, in their zeal to be inclusive, organizers ended up being scattershot. Among those invited were renowned scientists Jane Goodall and Richard Leakey, but also popularizers Carl Sagan and John Naisbitt; Nobel Peace laureates Oscar Arias

Sanchez and Rigoberta Menchu were joined by arch-feminist Susan Griffin and men's movement leader Sam Keen. An Onondaga Indian chief from New York, a best-selling Zen Buddhist author from Vietnam and the spiritual head of India's Sikhs added color to the proceedings but were largely ignored when they opened their mouths. And there was never any doubt as to who called the shots. "I doubt any big thinkers of the *next* century are here," grouched social critic Jeremy Rifkin. "We're just window-dressing for a few big names espousing Establishment views."

Theodore Roszak, author of *The Making of the Counter-Culture*, chose to withdraw from the gathering at the last moment, calling the pomposity of the assembled notables "an invitation to satire." In that respect, if in no other, the forum did not fail to satisfy. Few of the big names seemed equal to Gorbachev's open-ended challenge to come up with fresh ideas about globalization and development. Seasoned Cold Warrior Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser under President Jimmy Carter, perhaps rueing his own redundancy, shot down the prospect of post-Cold war optimism. "We have to face the fact that global philosophical emptiness will become pervasive," he announced, pausing a moment for effect before adding a grim non sequitur. "Does anyone in this room," he asked, "know a poor person who has had cosmetic surgery?" No one raised a hand.

If Brzezinski disseminated his world-weary wisdom in inscrutable riddles, media mogul Ted Turner chose the more accessible style of the high school football coach to convey his kinder, gentler brand of social Darwinism. "There's no excuse for us to be doing the dumb things any more," Turner reasoned. "It's just a simple matter of doing smart things and continuing to live, or to keep on doing dumb things and die."

Carl Sagan picked up on the theme of the planet's possible doom. Ignoring terrestrial sideshows such as the growing gulf between haves and have-nots, the rising tide of ethnic violence and the prospects of environmental calamity, Sagan warned of a more insidious threat to human existence: asteroids. "This is a problem for the whole species," he intoned, adding darkly that global leaders might just as well forget about enlisting the succor of space aliens to avoid astral bombardment. "Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark," he concluded. "The prospect of help coming from the outside is very small."

The only enveloping darkness in evidence, however, was surrounding Gorbachev's mind. He talked vaguely of forging a grand "fusion" between socialism and free-market economics, without so much as a hint of how he might tame the capitalist juggernaut. Instead, he repeatedly launched into tendentious discourses that left some listeners thinking he had slipped back into an all-night Politburo meeting. Of Gorbachev's penchant for verbal excess, Vladimir Nadeine, a U.S. correspondent for *Izvestia*, quipped, "He uses a dozen words when one will do."

Despite his high talk of globalism during the conference, Gorbachev's heart seemed to be in Russia. Avowing feelings of "moral responsibility for the future of reform and democracy in Russia," he even held out the possibility that he might run in next year's Russian presidential election—a prospect he knows is absurd, because he remains deeply unpopular among ordinary Russians. Communist Party members feel betrayed by him, while critics of the party identify him with the discredited regime. "He's one of the most controversial figures in Russia," said Nadeine of *Izvestia*. "While everyone knows his contribution to the end of Communism, he lost our country's great heritage in a few years."

Of course, he is hardly the first political leader to have given birth to a new world in which he had no place. Yet he is unwilling to go quietly; he remains deeply disturbed by Russia's uncertain future. Describing the December 17 parliamentary elections as "indispensable," he said, "People in the West should know we are working very hard to ensure that the elections take place and that they are fair, honest and democratic."

Gorbachev's sharpest criticisms were reserved for the government of Boris Yeltsin, whom he accuses of "conducting reforms recklessly." He compared the zeal with which Yeltsin's government privatized the Soviet economy to that of the Bolsheviks. "This is similar to the forced industrialization and collectivization [of the '20s and '30s], which took place without regard for the people," he said.

In such moments, Gorbachev seemed a bit hypocritical. Beyond mouthing liberal democratic pieties and fretting

about the spiritual crisis dogging civilization, he showed little grasp of how a truly democratic political culture might arise. Ever cautious, he spoke as if he had just discovered such familiar notions as rule by law and civil society, observing with great enthusiasm, for instance, that "a strong government is only possible where there's a strong executive, a strong parliament, an effective judiciary and a free press."

Similarly, when he railed against the global havoc wreaked by unchecked science and technology, he conveniently overlooked his own role in the Chernobyl disaster and the Soviet Union's awful record of industrial pollution.

Still, Gorbachev could be taken at his word when he said: "We should not try to build a new utopia; that would be too dangerous. But we must have a new vision, a new politics." What isn't clear, however, is how Gorbachev's "new"

politics will address what is probably the world's central issue: the rising influence of multinational corporations and their growing capacity to undermine national sovereignty.

Strangely, Gorbachev's gab-fest was subsidized almost entirely by big corporations and wealthy executives. Notorious influence-peddler Archer Daniels Midland, currently facing messy charges of price-fixing, donated \$250,000, making it the biggest patron. HarperCollins, which has published a book of Gorbachev's imponderable statements on world affairs, chipped in \$50,000. United Airlines, Prodigy and billionaire industrialist David

Packard kicked in \$25,000 each. Gorbachev's corporate patrons have promised to pay for four more summits before the end of the century, which perhaps explains Gorbachev's reticence on the subject of global corporate rule.

The general lack of specifics, however, left many participants uncomfortable. Richard Leakey, who traveled from Nairobi to attend the meeting despite losing both legs in a recent airplane crash, worried that the whole notion of a Gorbachev braintrust was "too ambitious." As a practical matter, "What does this beast we've created do?" he asked.

There was only one possible answer: to launch Gorbachev's new career as a global pundit. Bereft of political influence in the new Russia, going global is Gorbachev's only option. Among the prospects mentioned for Gorbachev was a role in the United Nations. "In the West, he is still a hero for many of us who never thought they'd see the Berlin Wall come down," gushed Jane Goodall.

Despite his failings, Gorbachev deserves better. More than any other Russian politician, he has shown generosity, sacrifice, compassion and a sense of justice. But as he admitted in an interview, he had a big hand in his own political demise. He was too cautious, too "evolutionary" in his move away from Marxism-Leninism, Gorbachev said. "We acted too slowly in reforming the Communist Party. And those who act late, they lose in politics."

G. Pascal Zachary is a writer based in Berkeley, Calif.



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POLITICS

Out by law

Faced with hostile ballot initiatives, gays and lesbians have forged new political ties.

By Gary Barlow

August is the month for county fairs in Idaho. They're big events, and almost everyone attends. But in the late summer of 1994, visitors to the Latah County Fair in the north Idaho city of Moscow were in for a surprise: In addition to the usual carnival rides, livestock competitions and Grange exhibits, they were greeted by the Palouse Lesbian Avengers. An Idaho Panhandle affiliate of a national gay and lesbian rights organization, the Palouse Avengers formed to fight Proposition One, a statewide referendum designed to strip gays, lesbians and bisexuals of legal protection from discrimination.

At the Latah County Fair, the Lesbian Avengers had planned to hand out chocolate kisses proclaim-

ing, "You've just been kissed by a lesbian." As north Idaho field coordinator for the No on One Coalition, I received a number of anxious phone calls from my bosses in Boise.

Their trepidation was perhaps understandable. In a conservative state like Idaho, they were very uneasy about directly confronting homophobia. A more prudent strategy, they reasoned, was to launch a campaign that presented the initiative as unnecessary and costly; they repeatedly summoned the specter of Colorado, which had lost millions of dollars in tourist revenues after voters there passed a 1992 anti-gay rights initiative. Hence, my supervisors in Boise wanted the Avengers to stay "on message"—that is, to stress the initiative's social costs rather than appeal to the tolerance of Idaho voters. The Avengers ultimately scrapped their kiss-and-tell strategy and set up an information table to hand out literature.

But the Avengers and other Proposition One opponents consistently pushed the limits of the coalition's cautious strategy:

They focused extensively on homophobia and, in the end, the initiative was defeated precisely because large numbers of Idahoans voted against discrimination. It's a lesson that should be taken to heart by groups struggling against anti-gay initiatives around the country. Our victory in Idaho—like last month's defeat of Question One, Maine's anti-gay ballot initiative—is clear evidence not only of the shallowness of the radical right's appeal to the American public, but also of the need for gay and lesbian groups to make themselves visible and to engage voters.

Anti-gay ballot initiatives are not a new idea, but the broad, statewide measures aimed at denying civil rights protections for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals began in earnest with the 1992 initiatives in Colorado and Oregon. Before that, anti-gay initiatives mainly sought to repeal local civil rights ordinances that granted protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation. The one notable exception was California's Proposition 6, also known as the Briggs initiative, which aimed to prevent gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools. Voters decisively rejected the measure in 1978.

The Colorado initiative, Amendment Two, passed in November 1992. Promoted largely by Colorado for Family Values, a right-wing group that has since helped launch anti-gay initiatives in other states, the measure sought to amend the state constitution to prohibit laws offering protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orienta-

This story was made possible by a grant from the Funding Exchange, which is financing a series of articles on grass-roots efforts to counter the conservative political agenda.

tion. With Amendment Two in place, the only way such protections could be instituted would be to pass yet another constitutional amendment.

The passage of Amendment Two shocked progressives in Colorado, not least because many had misjudged its appeal to voters. "A lot of people couldn't believe it would pass and sat it out," comments Sue Anderson, director of Equality Colorado, a gay and lesbian rights group. But perhaps more significantly, the campaign against the amendment failed to confront directly the "Yes on Two" campaign's central, misleading message—that failure to pass the initiative would allow municipalities to establish "special rights" for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. "They constantly put out the slogan of 'special rights,' and people didn't understand that," Anderson says. "Our side never came up with a good soundbite response to that."

By contrast, Oregon's No on 9 campaign, led by a coalition organized to counter that state's 1992 anti-gay initiative, not only challenged the "special rights" refrain, they also made the right's political agenda the overriding issue for many voters. They directly countered the "special rights" rhetoric with ads alleging that the extremists wanted a "special right" to discriminate. Although the right-wing Oregon Citizens Alliance subsequently pushed through a number of anti-gay measures in rural Oregon counties (which were later ruled unenforceable by the Oregon Supreme Court), 57 percent of Oregon voters rejected the measure.

Mounting a counteroffensive that highlighted a dubious conservative agenda was also effective in Idaho. Many No on One volunteers stressed that Proposition One would write employment discrimination into the law. Despite the reluctance of campaign strategists in Boise, volunteers in the field talked to voters about discrimination and homophobia—issues, they found, that most interested voters. And despite their lack of professional campaign training, the volunteers addressed those concerns directly, going door to door and manning phone banks for eight weeks, reaching as many as 2,000 voters a week in Coeur d'Alene alone.

If many in the No on One coalition were reluctant to confront the issue of homophobia, they also underestimated the extent to which a broad appeal for tolerance would appeal to many conservatives. For example, to the surprise of many, decisive voting margins against Proposition One appear to have come from districts in heavily Mormon southeast Idaho. Though explanations of this pattern are speculative, one important factor seems to have been mistrust of the right-wing groups that pushed the initiative. One such group, Focus on the Family, was tied to Jeremiah Films, the company that has produced, in addition to an infamous anti-gay rights video, a series of anti-Mormon programs. That link, coupled with the memory of Idaho's old anti-Mormon laws, was reportedly the subject of much discussion at local Mormon meetings during the campaign. Many Mormons didn't need to be reminded that if the

extremists can legalize discrimination against one group, then it's a short step to start singling out others.

Much the same logic prevailed in Tampa, Fla., this spring during a campaign to repeal the sexual orientation protections in the city's human rights ordinance. Knowing that large numbers of Tampa voters are African-American or Latino, Citizens for a Fair Tampa put discrimination at the top of the campaign message opposing repeal. As campaign coordinator in Tampa, I argued successfully that those voters were our most obvious allies. Some local gay and lesbian leaders were initially hesitant to reach out to these communities, but in the end they provided invaluable support for our campaign. Nadine Smith, a lesbian activist who co-chaired the 1993 March on Washington for Gay/Lesbian/Bi Equal Rights and currently serves on the Democratic National Committee, says flatly: "Everything in Tampa has changed because of the campaign we ran. It was the first time that the gay, lesbian, and bi-community really reached out to build strong alliances with other minority groups, and it has lots of implications for the future of politics here."

Smith's analysis becomes especially salient when one compares this year's campaign to a similar anti-gay rights initiative launched in Tampa in 1991. That initiative passed by a 58-42 percent margin, although it was later overturned in court on procedural grounds. In the early stages of the 1995 campaign, most polls and observers predicted similar results. But whereas in the 1991 campaign the anti-initiative forces targeted affluent, educated white precincts, our campaign spent more money advertising and working in African-American and Latino communities than anywhere else. We also conducted a visible campaign in the city's Jewish community. All the while, we stressed that the fight against the initiative was less about homosexuality than it was about whether or not we as a society were going to start singling out particular groups of people for discrimination. By March 1, a week before the election, the polls had us substantially ahead and local columnists were writing that we were headed for near-certain victory. Because Florida courts threw the referendum off the ballot on election eve, we were unable to test the effectiveness of our strategy. But internal polling from the campaign that tracked undecided voters in our targeted precincts confirmed that we succeeded in our effort to link the concerns of gays and lesbians with those of black and Latino voters.

"The radical right is pushing the race issue in a major way on things like affirmative action and is pushing us all in the same corner," says Mandy Carter, a longtime lesbian organizer and founder of the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum who worked with us on the campaign in Tampa. "So in a way, it's forcing us to build coalitions, at least nationally. On a local level, many white gays are still somewhat resistant to working on issues other than strictly gay issues. There's still a ways to go there."

For her part, Smith is committed to continuing the process of coalition-building in Tampa. "What we are trying to do

now in the aftermath of the campaign is to continue to strengthen those bonds between the gay, lesbian, and bi-community and communities of color and to make sure that we are there for them when they need us," she says. "I think a lot of people in Tampa now see how our issues are all interconnected; they didn't necessarily see that before."

While the organizing efforts to defeat anti-gay initiatives have produced encouraging results at the voting booth, they have come at great cost, and the battles are far from over. Robin Kane, a volunteer with the No on One campaign and former director of communications for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, cautions, "A negative of these initiatives is the time and resources spent defeating them. While we've learned to do some long-term organizing around them, the right-wing strategy has evolved past Colorado as well." Now that the Colorado Supreme Court has struck down Amendment Two, anti-gay rights groups have sought to make the language of the initiatives immune to legal challenges and less alarming to most voters. In Idaho, even many conservative voters objected to Proposition One's more onerous provisions, including one that would have made it legal to fire public employees simply because they were gay. That kind of language is gone from a proposed 1996 initiative in Idaho.

Although right-wing activists in Idaho are coming back with another initiative for the 1996 ballot, they will meet a changed gay, lesbian and bisexual community in many places. In Coeur d'Alene, which is home to the white supremacist Aryan Nations, gays, lesbians and bisexuals who first came together to fight Proposition One have formed People Like Us (PLUS), a social and educational group that is raising money for a 24-hour hotline and other long-term projects. PLUS is also pushing a local public radio affiliate to air *This Way Out*, a syndicated half-hour radio program on gay-related issues and culture. These are giant steps in north Idaho, and they are the direct result of people being forced to defend themselves against Proposition One.

Gay, lesbian and bi- activists are realizing that they can effectively challenge the radical right on their claim to represent the values of most Americans, especially as they relate to the concept of equality for all. Most Americans perceive themselves as fair-minded, and to many activists the future of our struggle lies not in a narrow assertion of gay rights but in a broad movement opposing discrimination in any form. In that context, the battle against the far right is just one aspect of a struggle against those who would perpetuate racism, sexism and a host of other evils that poison our society. While the radical right may have won some temporary skirmishes involving the framing of national values, the larger battle for the soul of America seems far from decided in places such as Oregon, Idaho and Florida. ◀

Gary Barlow is executive director of People Like Us, a gay, lesbian and bi- group in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.



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IN THE ARTS

Eloquent silences

*A new
Tunisian
film shatters
Western
myths about
Arab culture.*

By Pat Dowell

The *Silences of the Palace* is the first Tunisian film to get a distribution deal in the United States, and it should be an eye-opener for Americans who tend to think of the Arab world as a monolithic bloc of misogynist and rigidly censored cultures. Tunisia has a tiny film industry, partially subsidized by the government and fueled by European co-productions, and in some years it produces no more than one feature film. But if that one exhibited the quality and intelligence of Moufida Tlatli's complex drama of backstairs life in the household of colonial Tunisia's ruling family, the nation would be assured a prominent place in the world film community.

Tlatli is one of a handful of female directors at work in Tunisia, where women gained modern legal rights (including abortion) after the North African protectorate won its independence

from France in 1956. Those events form the unseen backdrop to Tlatli's story, which takes place in layers of flashbacks recalled by a young professional singer named Alia in 1966, 10 years after she has left the palace of the Bey, where she grew up with her mother, a servant. Alia returns to the palace for the funeral of the Bey (the Tunisian ruler under the French), whose illegitimate child she most probably was. The place evokes her memories; together, these flashbacks reveal a tragic story of a household in which no woman could raise a voice in her own defense, from the servant women who were expected to provide sexual favors for the princes to the royal wives who were expected to accept their husbands' infidelities.

The young Alia, 15 at the time the revolution was brewing, had begun to ask her mother, "Who is my father?" But her mother refused to answer. The imposed quiet regarding Alia's parentage is just one of the silences in this palace. The others include the silence of Alia's mother as she is raped by the Bey's

brother when she interrupts him fondling Alia, and the silence that Alia, a witness to the crime, thereafter lapses into as a kind of illness.

The silence that envelops them all—man and woman, rich and poor—is the silence imposed by complicity with French colonial rule. Even the powerful Bey is forced to quiet his voice at the behest of his colonial masters. He is ultimately no more than a political puppet, serving at the pleasure of the French, and his rule is little more than a negotiating point between the French and the independence movement. The political silence of the palace is occasionally broken by the sounds of struggle in the streets, which reach the servants only through clandestine radio reports and the sound of a popular song, which patriotically laments the surrender of Tunisia's soul to the French.

Tlatli's film deftly weaves together such cultural and personal symbols within a story of universal emotions—a young woman's search for her identity in all its aspects. Alia asks "who am I?" on the most intimate level (who is my father?) and in the broadest sense (what is my country?). When the young Alia finds her voice after her traumatic silence, she sings, and the song she



The Silences of the Palace
Directed by
Moufida Tlatli

© CAPITOL ENTERTAINMENT



have coped with questions of freedom and identity. Alia's mother, Khedija, wants no more unwanted ties to the royal family and undertakes an abortion induced by herbs and drugs, dying in the attempt. Alia, in the story that frames the flashbacks, has already survived several abortions at the urging of her boyfriend, a former revolutionary who has settled down into a slacker's life in independent Tunisia.

In scenes at the beginning of *The Silences of the Palace*, we see him and Alia talking of this latest pregnancy, and he has little concern for what she wants. He, like the Bey, wants none of the responsibility. But Alia is unsure, and it becomes clear that she has spent the last 10 years in uncertainty, her independence—and perhaps Tunisia's too?—a matter of form more than substance. She is still in thrall to a man who thinks mostly of himself. Tradition prevails, Tlatli seems to be saying—Alia, like Tunisia, must make her own decisions, not simply fall into a reaction to the past. Over the course of the film Alia's memories of her mother and the palace of her childhood remind her of exactly what is at stake—her self and the future. She makes a decision that doesn't exactly fit the feminist mold, but hews to the notion of choice. She finally breaks the most intransigent silence—the passivity she has accepted in herself.

The Silences of the Palace will surprise American filmgoers not only with its sophisticated approach to sexual politics but also with the wealth of acting talent on display. Ghalia Lacroix and Hend Sabri, who play the older and younger Alia, don't quite match in appearance, but both are compelling actresses. And the fact that Sabri's budding defiance seems to have melted out of the grown-up Lacroix provides an unexpected poignancy that suits the story. Ahmel Hedhili as the mother Khedija is really the heart of the film, a woman born too late, and she can convey worlds of emotion with the silences Tlatli gives her. Tlatli herself seems a major talent, too, serving as writer, director and editor. (For many years she was

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throws back at the Bey when asked to perform at the birthday party of his daughter (who is probably her half sister) is the forbidden patriotic song. It marks the end of her life at the palace, even as the Bey's life is changing forever too. And at the same moment, downstairs in the servants' quarters, Alia's mother is undergoing her own dangerous attempt at independence, an abortion.

Tlatli uses abortion metaphorically in a way that no American movie would dare. In an interview Tlatli told *In These Times* that abortion rights are not a controversial matter in Tunisia, as they are in the United States. She felt confident in posing two abortion stories in her film as examples of how her mother's generation and her own

Tunisia's premier editor.)

This is Moufida Tlatli's first feature film as a director, and it is a rare intellectual drama about women, as well as a model of blending the personal and the political in an allegory that is satisfying on both fronts. Which means you won't find it at the local multiplex. Like most foreign films, it is making its way slowly across the country. It has already played San Francisco and Washington; it is scheduled for Chicago in January, and has yet to open in New York. For more information on where you can see it, call the American company that picked it up for distribution: Ted and Ronnie Goldberg's Capitol Entertainment, (202) 363-8800. And while you're at it, compliment them on their taste. ◀

IN PRINT

Preaching to the subverted

By Linda DeLibero

Plough through any leftish academic journal published during the '80s and eventually you'll find it: the cultural studies essay, rife with celebrations of pomo irony and offering up (in indecipherable jargon) the latest pop phenom—Madonna or Pee Wee or Max Headroom—as an icon of subversion. The worst thing you could do if you were a cult stud was to say anything critical about TV or popular culture. That would be very '60s and uncool; besides, how could you cut a tragically hip figure among your students if you came out against, say, *Miami Vice*? You might as well sport an "I Love Tipper Gore" button.

Indeed, the previous decade, arguably one of the darkest ever for left politics, gave rise to a bizarre spectacle: Left academics going ga-ga over all the bloated, self-referential products of conservative culture, stuff that would have had most lefties screaming "Off the Pigs" a decade or so earlier. And now we have Jane Feuer's *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism*, an entire book devoted to the premise that you can love shows like *Dynasty* and still call yourself a radical. In fact, Feuer, who teaches film studies at the University of Pittsburgh, posits that rabid TV watchers like herself may have been "the true radicals of the decade," perfectly situated to understand Reaganite ideology as it unfolded from the tube. Kind of makes you rethink the whole meaning of political activism.

Not that it isn't possible to learn a great deal about cultural politics from prime-time TV. Television is, after all, the great purveyor of the status quo, able to reach an incredibly wide spectrum of the American public. And '80s television—which consolidated once and for all the unholy convergence of media, politics and entertainment—permanently altered the cultural landscape in ways we desperately need to understand. In short, a book about *that* might tell us how TV got to where it is today—powerful enough to dominate and even determine public discourse on issues both monumental and trivial.

Unfortunately, Feuer's book is saddled with the familiar mission: to demonstrate that TV is better than you thought it was, even at a time when you probably thought it was

pretty bad. To do that, Feuer has to effectively ignore any element of '80s television that clearly spoke to the less savory aspect of the decade. You won't find any discussion here of Willie Horton, or even of *The Cosby Show*—or anything having to do with race at all, for that matter. Nor is there any critical treatment of the ways television has successfully packaged consumerism as a substitute for any number of human concerns, most notably political involvement or solicitude for community life. Nor does Feuer address how the family values agenda came to take center stage in our national political drama, primarily through shows (like *Cagney and Lacey* or *Kate and Allie*) that repeatedly played on women's anxieties about joining the workforce.

Taking up any one of these difficult subjects would force Feuer to take a critical stance toward the medium she celebrates. It would also force her to engage in a far wider range of televisual events than she does here. Save for a chapter on Reaganite populism in made-for-TV movies (by far the best material in the book), the greater part of her discussion is devoted to "revealing," according to the dustjacket, "the contradictions and tensions at work in much prime-time programming," which boils down, finally, to an extended analysis of two shows, *thirtysomething* and *Dynasty*. Not only does this limited purview belie the grander promise of her title, it makes for some pretty unsurprising revelations.

For example, Feuer discusses *thirtysomething* in the context of yuppie television and finds that a) yuppies were a marketing/media construct; b) the construct played on baby-boomers' guilt over discovering their inner materialists; and c) *thirtysomething* both honed and assuaged that guilt so that boomer viewers could have it both ways. In other words, a character like Gary, the hippie-holdout academic, could look like a schmuck or a prince, depending on where the viewer—and the writers—stood on the guilt-o-meter that week. Indeed, *thirtysomething* was marvelously adept at addressing the anxieties of its limited viewership, only to calm them with visions of plenitude and (pun intended) hope. But this is hardly news; entire books have been devoted to the dynamics of *thirtysomething*, and the



Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism
By Jane Feuer
Duke University Press
154 pp., \$14.95



overeducated audience that watched the show incessantly discussed its overt manipulations.

Similarly, Feuer's discussion of *Dynasty* treads familiar ground. Setting up a straw man, Feuer blames the popular press for misrepresenting the show as a simple celebration of Reagan-era excess. Put aside the fact that the bad guy in these academic tomes is never, say, the network honcho, but always some phantom elitist TV journalist with the temerity to suggest that some TV shows *just aren't very good*. And put aside the fact that the majority of *Dynasty* viewers were well aware that the show was an intentionally trashy send-up of Reaganite avarice; in fact, the irony—as with so much TV—made it OK, even hip, to take the trash seriously. Feuer, looking again for those “contradictions and tensions,” claims that *Dynasty* was a far more complex, subversive phenomenon than you thought, because some gay men camped the show, dressing up as Alexis and throwing weekly *Dynasty* parties. The trouble is, camp hasn't been a serious form of political expression since Susan Sontag wrote about it in the mid-'60s—it's purely mainstream. The point of those *Dynasty* parties was not, after all, to say “you can take all your mid-cult bourgeois values and shove them,” but “we want a share of those values, too!” It's a perfectly legitimate desire, but there's not an ounce of sub-cultural subversion to it.

The point, in *Seeing Through the Eighties* as in so many other cultural studies projects, is to demonstrate that the dominant ideology was not so dominant after all and that the infinite variety of televisual readings proves it. Watching TV is not only fun, these works argue, it's a way to demon-

strate your inability to be taken in by it. Not surprisingly, that approach has worn thin pretty quickly. Any theory that attaches itself so worshipfully to its subjects is bound to go out with the times; today, when references to Crockett and Tubbs or Krystal and Blake sound about as fresh and subversive as “23-skidoo,” the whole project of finding viewer empowerment in such banalities seems stale and trivial. What does it tell us, after all, about the power of the medium? Purposefully vague about politics and history, busily ferreting out radical meaning in the most ordinary products, cultural studies has largely failed to explain or predict anything about TV except that lots of people—including academics—watch a lot of it.

Finally, any book that purports to speak honestly about TV and empowerment will have to address the concerns that ordinary people are voicing right now—concerns that have their roots in '80s TV but that Feuer's book doesn't even touch: too much violence, network monopolies, the daily disgrace of talk-show culture, the abysmal state of media politicking. So far the left has demonstrated a marked unwillingness to address any of these issues, opening the way for the Bob Doles and William Bennetts of the world to define our cultural agenda. But those complaints about television aren't just coming from the fabled Christian right; they're coming from all over the political spectrum. Until left-minded intellectuals are willing to shut up and listen to the public's actual anxieties about TV, they're leaving the popular culture debate to some pretty subversive characters indeed. ◀

Linda DeLibero is a freelance writer based in Baltimore.

The fire last time

By **Randall Balmer**

We have become a nation of second-guessers. Post-mortems on current events have become the common currency of our political life, from policy questions (perhaps affirmative action doesn't promote equality after all) to matters of diplomacy and war (maybe we should never have sent ground troops to the Persian Gulf, and maybe the president should never have pledged the same to Bosnia).

For months now, the American right has focused its second-guessing around the government siege of David Koresh's Mount Carmel compound near Waco, Texas. The 51-day standoff ended on April 19, 1993, and claimed the lives of 74 Branch Davidians. Together with the FBI's assault on survivalist and white supremacist Randy Weaver and his family at Ruby Ridge, Idaho—which claimed casualties on both sides—the Waco episode figures prominently in the virulent anti-government mythology of the far (and not-so-far) right.

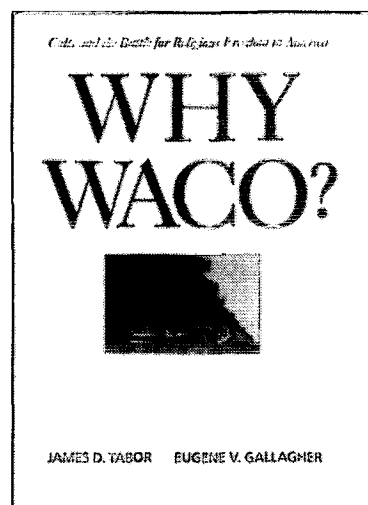
Perhaps it is not surprising that Koresh, with his messianic and apocalyptic message, occupies such a place in the American political imagination, for Americans have long had an apocalyptic and millennial temper, in both our religion and our politics. In an odd way, Koresh's followers trod much the same path blazed by countless other American revivalists and sectarians—albeit without Koresh's singularly unsettling penchant for collecting firearms. Seventh-Day Adventist founder William Miller comes to mind, as does Charles Taze Russell, who gathered his followers on the Sixth Street bridge in Pittsburgh on Good Friday, 1878, to await the millennial dawn. Less confrontational prophets of the millennium have included everyone from Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney to Billy Graham and Jimmy Swaggart.

Among the legions of millennialists in American history, the premillennialists—those who expect Jesus to return *before* the millennium, the thousand-year reign of righteousness predicted in the Book of Revelation—have been most vociferous in their condemnation of the nation's culture. Whereas postmillennialists (like Edwards) believe that Jesus will return after the millennium and that believers must be active in reforming the culture according to the norms of godliness, premillennialists hold to a theology of despair, one that insists the world is getting worse and worse.

According to this scenario, Jesus' return to rescue the faithful will precipitate a final confrontation between earthly and heavenly powers, and thereby bring the Kingdom of God crashing down around reprobate ears.

It is not difficult to see how this temperament overlaps with the increasingly dour and prophetic mood of the American right. The shrill voices on the right are apt, like Koresh and other sectarian millennialists, to demonize the very idea of government. They tend to embrace absolutist stands on moral issues that they identify with the divine will, and in spite of their very considerable power in the nation's capital, they portray themselves as a persecuted, visionary vanguard. In both their secular and religious incarnations, the true believers of the American right view themselves as latter-day Jeremiahs, a righteous remnant inveighing against a corrupt and corrosive society.

Both the Ruby Ridge and the Waco incidents were tragic, regrettable and probably avoidable. But the fallout, the second-guessing and the recriminations have been far out of proportion to the provocations—even if you exempt the devastating terrorist attacks on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and on an Amtrak rail line in Arizona, both deliberate responses to Waco and all it symbolizes in the mythology of the right. Many on the left—or what is left of the left—have been quick to attribute all this second-guessing to handy demons on the other side, like the eminent talk-radio personality and prevaricator Rush Limbaugh. And certainly Limbaugh, Bob Grant, Michael Reagan, Jan Michaelson and other right-wing *provocateurs* must bear their share of responsibility for the culture of second-guessing that surrounds government in general and the Clinton administration in particular. According to this rather narrow interpretation of Waco, the conservatives in Congress merely jumped at an obvious opportunity to embarrass the president when they convened special hearings on the Waco raid and the Weaver standoff this summer. Once summoned, Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh had to concede lapses in judgment and endure a hand-slapping from self-righteous members of Congress, who, while reading from prepared texts that exploited every benefit



Why Waco?
Cults and the Battle for
Religious Freedom in America
 By James D. Tabor and
 Eugene V. Gallagher
 University of California Press
 252 pp., \$24.95

of 20/20 hindsight, insisted before the whirring cameras that they were shocked, truly shocked, at such egregious conduct.

As far as it goes, this attack on the hypocrisy of conservatives is not unwarranted. But by overlooking the ideological elements of life in the Branch Davidian compound and the reaction to the Waco tragedy, it fails to explain the profound, even pathological, anger that has taken shape in Waco's aftermath. At the same time, many liberal intellectuals who do acknowledge these ideological matters view the Waco tragedy through an equally narrow lens of liberal toleration. Witness, for example, the spate of books that has appeared in the wake of Waco—especially James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher's *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*. The authors, both professors of religious studies, insist that the government acted far too precipitately in its handling of Koresh, both during the initial siege and the final invasion. They argue heatedly, and rather persuasively, that once the government had committed itself to apprehending Koresh, it did its best to justify the siege—and the denouement—by portraying Koresh publicly as dangerous, mentally unstable, a child molester and a cult leader.

Tabor and Gallagher take vigorous exception to these characterizations of Koresh, and especially to the use of the term "cult," which, they argue—and I agree—is invariably pejorative. They adopt a liberal, uncritical live-and-let-live attitude toward Koresh and his sect, an attitude that is the essence of multiculturalism. This is a tall order under the circumstances, since Koresh seems to deserve any number of pejorative characterizations, but this doesn't prevent the authors from plunging ahead with their case. Tabor and Gallagher go out of their way to show that Koresh's erratic and aberrant behavior and his loopy interpretations of Scripture—including his own messianic claims—were really not that unusual after all. They blithely dismiss Mount Carmel's cache of illegal weapons, as well as the evidence for Koresh's sexual relations with young girls in his community of disciples—both used as justification for government action and both, ironically, the subject of dramatic corroborative testimony at this summer's Waco hearings—as reasonable expressions of religious conviction. Tabor and Gallagher even accept at face value Koresh's explanation that "having children with the Davidian women, who were pure in body and spirit, had nothing to do with sexual lust or desire."

If the right is guilty of fanning the flames of suspicion and second-guessing in the Waco case, the left, hewing to the doctrine of laissez-faire multiculturalism, is guilty of an almost comic accommodation, the kind that could only emanate from a seminar room. Does the celebration of plu-

ralism and multiculturalism—a noble ideal, to be sure—demand that we discard all discernment? Does *every* expression of faith or conviction merit toleration, even when it violates the law or imperils others? Tabor and Gallagher seem to think so.

I'm not so sure. It seems to me possible to acknowledge that the government may have overstepped its bounds or acted with excessive violence and at the same time acknowledge that Randy Weaver, a fugitive from justice, was a gun nut and a threat to his neighbors. Yes, I believe that the government probably should have walked away from Mount Carmel after the initial, failed assault rather than escalating the confrontation with a blockade and a propaganda campaign. But, having said that, I feel no compunction about saying that Koresh was a delusional, self-anointed messiah who had a dangerous fixation with artillery and who probably indulged his sexual weakness for young girls. I see no reason that an embrace of toleration should demand a suspension of judgment.

At times, it's not difficult to see why Limbaugh and his confederates have succeeded in turning "liberal" into a four-letter word. Toleration too often devolves into permissiveness and, in this case, something akin to lionization. In the final decade of the 20th century, liberalism seems to be afflicted with a chronic inability to articulate a positive vision of the good society that can produce even a modicum of discernment. And ironically, in abetting the culture of second-guessing surrounding Waco and Ruby Ridge, the left's leading doctrines of toleration and multiculturalism can directly fuel the next round of outrageous distortions from demagogues on the right. Limbaugh, for example, can harrumph that even liberals think the government went too far in Waco. In the next breath, however, he can chide these same liberals for having no discernment and for tolerating even the most bizarre ideas and behavior. It's a neat trick; no wonder the conservatives are winning.

In the struggle to arrive at some balance between freedom of religious expression and the bare conditions needed to sustain and nourish a democratic culture, liberals have, as in so many other questions of genuine moral substance, quit the field. The longer they neglect to take critical stock of these issues, the more they invite not just the invective of the talk-show terrorists but the deliriums of David Koresh, Timothy McVeigh and the other keepers of a ruinous premillennial political faith.

Randall Balmer is a professor of religion at Barnard College and the author of *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (Oxford, 1989), as well as the forthcoming *Grant Us Courage: Travels Along the Mainline of American Protestantism* (Oxford).



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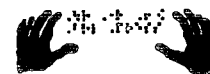
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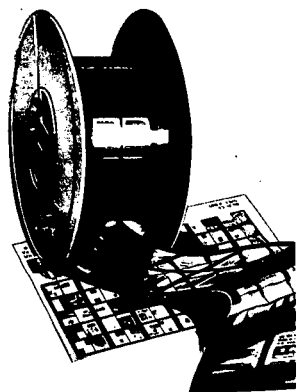
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among skittish Democratic incumbents that they can stay in office by convincing their white electorate that they hate the same people the "little guy" hates.

Although this logic defies any moral justification, neither does it let the rest of us off the hook. The silence resounding through the Capitol echoes that of the traditional liberal constituencies that might, by force of sheer self-interest, if not something grander, be expected to turn out to defend welfare. Thus Pat Schroeder, who is among the best of the bunch in Congress, posed an unanswerable question to our delegation: If welfare was so important, she asked wearily, how come her constituents never had a kind word to say on its behalf? Obviously, many of the people who use Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Medicaid and Food Stamps do not have the time to lobby Congress; they're too busy trying to find work, health care and the means to keep their families together. But Schroeder's question calls forth a host of other troubling questions: Where are the service-industry unions whose members are sure to face layoffs and wage cuts once bipartisan public policy shoves thousands of welfare recipients into their jobs—or else drives them into jobs at the bottom of the ladder, dragging down the negotiating power of everyone higher up? Where are the government employees, from welfare caseworkers to doctors who do rounds in nursing homes, who will lose their clients and maybe their jobs if the federal government just picks up its marbles and goes home? Where are the relatively well-off liberals who support public welfare spending out of compassion, self-interest, or some combination of the two? Where, for that matter, are the readers of *In These Times*?

Progressive forces haven't been entirely absent from the welfare debate. So far, however, feminist and women's groups like the Women's Committee of 100 have been much more involved in the welfare fight than groups from the traditional left. After taking repeated (and often deserved) hits for jerry-rigging their agenda to serve only middle-class white women, some feminist leaders and organizations have been jolted out of their long slumber over issues of race and class. The groups include relatively staid outfits such as the American Association of University Women, Business and Professional Women, and the YWCA, all of which argued for preserving welfare in a recent meeting with White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta. The individuals include several hundred women college professors (who usually shy away from extracurricular politics); regulars like Frances Fox Piven, Barbara Ehrenreich and Rep. Patsy Mink of Hawaii; and some less predictable allies from the first generation of modern feminism such as Betty Friedan, former Rep. Bella Abzug and former National Organization for Women President Molly Yard.

An unlikely tableau on my lobbying junket dramatized this emerging realignment in the house of feminism. On the first morning of our rounds, Betty Friedan walked in late to a face-off with Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro of New Haven, Conn. "I'm being realistic," DeLauro kept saying, to

explain her capitulation to conservative pressure. Friedan would have none of it. She sat regally in an enormous fake-leather chair, her incredibly familiar features trained on the dodgy congresswoman as she pronounced her unstinting verdict: "I have to tell you, Rosa, if the president and Congress don't defeat this bill, I'm going to vote for Powell. I feel that strongly about it." DeLauro, a good Democrat, visibly trembled at the prospect.

This moment said a lot about the shifting fortunes of modern feminism. Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was, after all, a midwife to the modern feminist movement. Today it stands as a monument to that movement's shortsightedness. What Friedan called "the problem that has no name"—the malaise of inactivity suffered by educated suburban housewives—was no problem at all for working-class women or women of color, almost all of whom were already in the waged labor force. By the early '80s, Friedan's vision had broadened. In her 1981 book, *The Second Stage*, she was urging feminists to "take back from the right" the offensive "for family" and "for life," a position that earned her a good deal of scorn from feminist critics. That in 1995 Friedan would be making the feminist case for saving welfare on much the same ground—and getting far less flak for it—is a testament to how the movement she has helped found has begun to change.

This is doubtless because the pending round of welfare cuts is proving Friedan right: Welfare is about "families" and "lives" and women—not only, as feminists said in the late '70s, because "every woman is just a man away from welfare," but because the subtext of debates about the marital, economic and reproductive behavior of welfare mothers is an effort to control the behavior and autonomy of all women. In seeing this, Friedan, the standard-bearer of oldish feminism, is light years ahead of such "young feminists" as Naomi Wolf, whose recent appeal in *The New Republic* to feminists to rethink their abortion stances is jejune, self-serving and badly mistimed. Friedan's utterly sensible politics also put her—and the other women of her generation who have rallied to her cause—head and shoulders above the attention-generating haggles (on all sides) who argue over campus date rape policies and speech codes. Feminists fighting on welfare's behalf are neither "New Victorian" nor "pro-sex"; they merely insist on a relatively unconstrained economic and political context in which women can make their own decisions about men, children and sexual morality.

The question now is whether other progressives will follow the tentative lead of the women's movement. Our predominant stance of hating the Republicans, disdaining mainstream politics and avoiding the morning papers can only take us so far. In the deafening silence that has met both major parties' efforts to decimate social welfare, we can hear the enemy. And it is us.

Felicia Kornbluh is a member of the Women's Committee of 100. For more information, call or write: Women's Committee, c/o National Association of Social Workers, 750 1st Street, N.E., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. (202) 336-8345.



ON THE END

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The end of the American welfare state is nigh, and it is dying not with a bang but with a whimper. Nowhere is this so apparent as at the U.S. Capitol, where I recently spent two days with women activists and intellectuals trying to convince senators and representatives to reject the maniacal welfare legislation now emerging from a House-Senate conference committee. Some incarnation of this legislation seems likely to win Bill Clinton's approval, despite his own administration's report predicting that it will send a million more children into poverty. (As of this writing, the president has strongly indicated he will veto the "reform" package that Republicans plan to send him from their House-Senate conference committee. However, this is merely an opening gambit; Clinton champions a somewhat less harsh version of "welfare reform," and may yet acquiesce to some marginally improved version of the Republican bill.)

Lobbying may be a heady experience for some, particularly those who make a handsome living doing it. But my own efforts only brought home the degree to which welfare seems continually to resist recognition as a defensible social good. On my rounds through Congress—organized under the aegis of the Women's Committee of 100, a coal-

tion of feminists fighting to save some semblance of the social safety net—I encountered one renowned liberal and/or feminist legislator after another saying that (s)he wanted to do all the right things but could not take the risk of opposing the "welfare reform" juggernaut. It's depressing enough to hear this kind of conservative talk from Old Confederates such as Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole. To hear it from pseudo-populists such as Sen. Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, old-line liberals such as Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island and such ballyhooed products of the "year of the woman" as Patty ("just a mom in tennis shoes") Murray of Washington state is beyond endurance. And that was just in the Senate.

In some ways, this horse-trading approach to matters of great human significance is just business as usual in the corridors of power. The elected mandarins and their young staffers, many of whom look as though they haven't yet run through their first set of nylons, wield the cold steel of short-term political calculation. Their combined action and inaction is subjecting the U.S. welfare state to the slow but savage death of a thousand cuts. What matters most to them is re-election, and it has clearly become an article of faith

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